



Tips for Success: How To Excel as a Real Estate Attorney

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Every year, the who's who in the real estate industry attend the Real Estate Law and Business Symposium sponsored by the LACBA Real Property Section and the USC Gould School of Law. This year was no different as attorneys, developers, accountants, owners, brokers, investors, financiers and others gathered on April 19, 2007, to discuss the latest trends and current legal issues affecting the real estate market.

What was different, however, was a new session specifically directed to real estate attorneys in their first ten years of practice. Moderator, Lynn Williams of Cushman & Wakefield, led a panel of renowned real estate lawyers – Sonia Ransom of Allen Matkins Leck Gamble Mallory & Natsis LLP, Michael Smook of Fulbright & Jaworski, and Alan Wayte of DLA Piper US LLP – in a discussion about how to succeed as a real estate attorney.

As lawyers, we have to keep up to date on changes in the law and be knowledgeable about our area of practice. However, here are some ways to distinguish yourself and obtain success as a real estate attorney:

Get To Know The People With Whom You Work. Another benefit to leaving your office every once in a while is that you can get to know the people with whom you work. Why, you ask? Because you spend a lot of time with these people and on a professional and personal level many of them will have something to offer you and you them. If you give it a chance, you may find that you have similar interests, have had similar experiences or can learn from each other.

Be Honest With Yourself And Your Clients. There will be times where you will not be able to attend a meeting or other client-related event because of a commitment somewhere else. The worst thing you can do is ignore the conflict and promise to be in two places at once; you will only end up disappointing someone. Clients are people with demands, expectations, deadlines and the need to balance a professional and personal life. As long as you are honest with your client, they will understand and appreciate the honesty.

Out of Mind But No Longer Out of Sight

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become increasingly prevalent over the past several years. Based on today's real estate market, Mr. Bollinger has indicated that more and more bankruptcy courts will be addressing the issue concerning bankruptcy hindrance mechanisms employed by secured lenders, and whether these particular lenders will be able to ultimately foreclose on the subject properties.

IV. Conclusion

The economic climate is such that you may come across many of the issues addressed in this article. Hopefully, as a real estate practitioner, you will be able to recognize some of these issues, and determine to what extent the BAPCA revisions will have on your real estate practice and the representation of your clients.

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Respond To Your Clients. One of the top things that a client appreciates in a lawyer is his or her ability to timely respond to and make that client feel special and valued. There are three easy ways you can do this: (i) pick up your own phone when a client calls rather than have it go to voicemail, or have it routed through a receptionist or a secretary; (ii) return all phone calls and emails within a few hours of receiving them; and (iii) make sure every phone call and email has been responded to before you leave at the end of everyday. With blackberries and cell phones, there is no reason why you should not respond to a client the same day. You would be surprised how much a client will value and respect you for it.

Leave The Office Sometimes. As lawyers we often get caught up in everything we have to do that sometimes we forget to stop and take a break from our busy schedules. Grab lunch or coffee with a colleague either within or outside of your office. Your mind needs a break every now and again – give it one.

Find And Be A Mentor. Lawyers at every stage of their career need to learn from other people in order to succeed. However, with the demands on today's lawyers and the diversity in law firms, the old structure of a senior partner mentoring a new associate may not always be ideal and a forced mentoring relationship is almost always doomed to fail. Instead, you need to determine for yourself what your personal goals and objectives are and then surround yourself with people who can assist you in accomplishing those goals. Find people with whom you have things in common, whether professionally or personally, people who have accomplished the things you strive to accomplish and people who can provide the information you seek. While looking for your group of mentors, do not be afraid to be a mentor for someone else.

Treat People With Respect. Every person is important, no matter what their background, job, position, education or socioeconomic situation and every person deserves to be treated with respect. This philosophy applies to the people with whom you work, your clients, opposing counsel and anyone you meet. There is nothing to gain from being a bully or being rude. You are much more likely to be taken seriously and achieve your desired result if you are courteous and respectful.

Opportunities For Business Development Surround You. One of the hardest, but most important, skills for a lawyer is client development. Even young lawyers like you can begin marketing yourself and your firm at an early stage in your career. After all, the average time it takes from first meeting someone to having them retain you as their lawyer is 5 years. Why not start early? The good news is that potential clients are everywhere. So be active in your favorite charity, join and be active in a trade organization such as the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC) or the Urban Land Institute (ULI), write an article, give a speech or do anything else that you feel comfortable doing. Business development opportunities will present themselves. You just need to keep your eyes and ears open.

Participate In Outside Activities. In addition to being a potential source of future clients, your participation in outside activities will make you a more interesting and well-rounded person. The best lawyers are individuals who not only are good at practicing law, but are also interesting people. Having interests unrelated to the practice of law will not only be rewarding for you,

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but will allow you to carry on conversations with others in social situations. You could meet a new client because you have the same interests.

Be A Good Person. To be a good lawyer, you must first be a good co-worker, a good friend, a good spouse, a good parent, a good neighbor and a good citizen. Good people attract great work and great clients.

Remember How You Got To Where You Are. If you think about it, a lot of people have helped you become the person you are. People have touched your life in a variety of ways. Don't forget those people. They can and will continue to be a source of support, knowledge and clients.

Excelling as a real estate attorney is not something that can be achieved overnight, but keep these tips in mind and you will succeed.