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Law Firms' Future Isn't About Rainmaking. It's About Change-Making.

Change-makers are quickly becoming a driving force in helping partners buy into new ways of thinking.

By Debra Baker

Met the rising star of new law: the change-maker.

Change-makers are lawyers with a relentless focus on growth who also recognize that long-term success requires more than revenue generation alone. With the head of a rainmaker and the heart of an innovator, change-makers are quickly becoming a driving force in helping partners buy into new ways of thinking.

Like rainmakers, change-makers are proven sellers with a high degree of visibility and influence across their firms. What differentiates them is the way they leverage their skills to promote growth through collaboration and innovation.

In doing so, they are helping firms calibrate for growth by promoting efforts to build balanced client portfolios, to attract and retain top talent, and to create more purposeful cultures



centered on the client and partner experience.

Don't be mistaken—the change-maker is not a selfless Pollyanna out to change the status quo for the sake of making the world a better place. They simply understand the complexities around making change stick inside a firm where partners aren't just lawyers but are also sellers, account managers, owners, operators and investors.

As such, they see the importance of broadening the view of what it takes to sustain long-

term growth in an environment where the only constant is change.

At their core, change-makers are growth ambassadors who support leadership by using their credibility to make the case for change and amplify leadership's call to action; ensuring innovation is focused on the client experience through collecting client feedback, inviting clients into the process and accelerating client engagement by participating actively with them in the process; and modeling positive behaviors around

collaboration and effective teaming.

Change-makers' superpower is that they are master sellers. They recognize that the biggest thing holding their organizations back is the organization's own resistance to change. Change-makers understand how to sell the idea that change is in the firm's self-interest.

Just as a rainmaker knows that trying to persuade someone to buy when they aren't ready will never work, change-makers know that you can't make a partner do something unless the partner decides it's a good idea. Push too hard when someone isn't ready to buy in and you not only lose the individual, you create a "change-buster" whose negative ripple effect can cripple growth efforts.

Change-busters use their voice and influence to actively resist change, using three primary weapons:

- **Time.** Time is our most valuable and highly guarded asset. Its scarcity is universal, and it is hard to counter the defense that a person does not have enough time to participate in a growth initiative, particularly when the rewards are not immediate.

- **Money.** If time is a weapon of mass destruction, money is the equivalent of a high-impact missile. You've seen it at your firm in the form of a comment such as, "Sounds like a great idea, but it won't work with our current compensation structure."

The money weapon is particularly dangerous because it targets a firm's highest performers, who may perceive taking a chance on doing something different as a threat to their earnings, even when there is little or no evidence to prove the claim true.

- **Fear.** Fear is like a stealth bomb. It is usually unstated and often unconscious. Lawyers face relentless pressure for perfection. Fears of failure, rejection, looking bad, making a mistake and being ridiculed exist every day. Suggesting that lawyers add a change in process or outlook to their existing anxiety can feel threatening. It's important to identify this invisible factor in order to disarm it.

Change-makers are not only able to fight their own inner change-buster; they are able to combat these resisters. They don't manage change. They sell it. They leverage the same breadth of sales approaches they use for business development to sell partners on change, and they use a variety of profiles to do it.

The Educator

Many initiatives get stuck at the starting gate because of a failure to clearly define and communicate the what, why and the way to create change. Change-makers educate their partners by making the case for innovation in a way that opens their partners' eyes to the potential and possibility of change.

Say a firm is launching a new technology to automate part of a

core service offering. A pitch to the partnership might be: "We have identified innovation as a top priority. As part of that effort, we are pleased to launch Project X. For it to be successful, we need you to do these three things. Here's how we can make it easy for you."

An educator, on the other hand, would reframe the conversation by telling their partners something like, "After studying this effort, I'm convinced that this product will save me time, generate new business development opportunities and—if we do it right—we're all going to end up making more money without working any harder."

The Lead Generator

While rainmakers have natural strength around generating leads from potential clients, change-makers use these same skills to create demand for something new and different. By supporting new initiatives with positivity, energy and excitement, they have a multiplying effect on early adoption because of the halo effect they create for those involved.

The Account Manager

Rainmakers make great account managers because they build deep client relationships through empathy and trust-building. Change-makers use these same skills to build trust and loyalty with their partners. By focusing on both the client and partner experience, they can establish credibility and

enable partners to take a risk on change.

The Architect

Rainmakers are gifted when it comes to building solutions to client problems. Change-makers do the same by providing a blueprint to show their partners how upgrades and reconfigurations of resources will provide greater results than any individual group on its own. This one-plus-one-equals-three approach creates conditions for collaboration and innovation in ways education and trust-building alone never could.

The Inventor

Rainmakers anticipate change. They share market changes with clients and help them think about their business differently. Change-makers use this approach to help partners anticipate how market trends are impacting their practices in ways that make the status quo feel riskier than trying something new.

Getting Started

Change-makers are quickly outpacing rainmakers as the most valuable resource inside law firms. Some are easy to spot, but they may not even know

who they are. The first step to leveraging the power of a change-maker is to have a clearly defined and communicated vision around growth and innovation. With that in place, there are several ways you can start to identify, nurture and develop change-makers.

The easiest place to start is with your rainmakers. Are some also change-makers, and, if not, who has the potential to become one? New research provides a clear window into what those attributes are, and a validated talent assessment—a data-driven tool that identifies competencies and potential—will help you predict them in team members. Predictive talent analytics can make you smarter about who to invest in, and reduce the risk of unconscious bias.

If you lack partners with natural change-maker strengths, you may want to start uncovering existing partners who share some of the requisites for change-making. You may also want to incorporate this profile into your recruiting strategy. You can improve your likelihood for success by getting smarter about

understanding your partnership's natural growth capacities. Again, this is where data analytics can help you make smarter decisions and accelerate results.

If becoming a change-maker yourself is appealing, start by understanding your own strengths, compare those against how you are performing, and seek training to develop those skills.

There is good news for firms that are already investing in business development coaching and training. Your existing efforts can be tailored toward the development of change-makers to elevate your return on investment.

No organization can eliminate change-busters completely. But by defining them, pinpointing where they exist, and developing your change-maker workforce, you will create conditions for growth and innovation to thrive.

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