



Self Promotion part 2

Solutions and tips

In the last issue of Link, **Rachel Brushfield** explored the factors affecting how female lawyers promote themselves and the effect this has on their careers. In this article, part two, she explores ways to stop the talent drain of talented female lawyers and provide support so that their talent is fully realised for their own benefit and that of their firms.

Increase understanding of differences between the sexes and celebrate their different approaches

Most people would agree, women have qualities that are different to and complementary to men's. Rather than trying to play men at their own game, utilising and celebrating women's qualities would boost their confidence. Women's skills are great for building relationships, key to happy clients. They can also be used to bring down the bridges that stop cross selling within firms.

Women can help men to be more empathetic and men can help women to take more risks. Identifying the individual qualities of all employees and playing to their strengths would achieve a greater result, as well as provide mentoring in the firm.

Self awareness - explore beliefs about marketing and self promotion

I find that people often have limiting beliefs about themselves or about self-promotion. Frequently women think that singing their own praises is pushy or somehow 'unseemly'. And yet huge untapped increases in productivity can be realised if procrastination and self-deprecation for example were to be minimised.

Examining and changing beliefs is the best way to change behaviour and to boost self-confidence for long-term change. More and more personal development is taking place, especially for women and the payback will be that women are stopped from holding themselves back.

Develop your employee brand

A major trend in the war for talent is the creation of tailor made packages for each individual. The world of work fundamentally needs to change, away from constraining and outdated practices such as 9 - 5 and Monday to Friday. Resistance to change is a normal phenomenon, but Law firms are more traditional than many sectors, and cautious by their naturally risk-averse natures. Wise and courageous law firms will make a huge leap and reap rewards, motivating female lawyers who want flexible working and Generation Y who expect it. The reward for biting the bullet and removing outdated working practices will be stealing the cream of talent.

Clear goals and plan

The focus with most practices on time recording and billable hours in itself makes marketing and business development feel fuzzy by comparison. When people don't have clarity about what they are trying to achieve, often they procrastinate, and then feel bad for not being focused. A clear goal or outcome to be achieved from investing the time in self-promotion is motivating and acts as impetus. The goal will be individual and needs to be compelling and then broken down into simple steps to achieve it.

Make time for and reminders to self promote

Time is lacking in modern world, especially in busy law firms and even more so for working mothers. Creating a regular time of week to focus on promoting yourself can keep the momentum going to raise your profile or get more business from existing

clients. Many of us are familiar with running an efficient and effective diary system. Why not include in it a repeating reminder for self-promotion?

Purposeful networking

Some people love networking and others hate it. Anybody can learn to enjoy it if they change their perception of it. For example with one client, we examined her original belief of "I hate networking" and identified a core value of "I love connecting with people", which changed how she felt completely. She went from dreading networking to relishing it.

Executive/personal coaching

A coaching session is time in your diary regularly e.g. say fortnightly or monthly, to regularly focus on you with someone who is trained to champion you and stop you from stopping yourself. Sometimes it is easier to blow someone else's trumpet than your own! Coaching transforms someone's confidence levels and supports them in pushing out of their comfort zone to promote themselves. It also creates simple actions on a regular basis to make change easy.

Mentoring

A mentoring scheme with female partners or senior managing partners who have mastered the art of self-promotion can help and advise younger female solicitors. Sharing support, tips and examples of how they overcame their blocks about self promotion and being confident not arrogant are very useful. Women's networks such as AWS through their meetings, magazine and initiatives provide a supportive environment for women to shine.

Image consultant

Often if you look good on the outside, you will feel good on the inside. Addressing how you feel about yourself on the inside is essential for sustained change. Creating a distinctive look that matches your character and employee brand also works wonders. If you look good, you'll feel good on the inside, and this comes across as an attractive natural confidence, which is very engaging.

Fake confidence

There are many techniques that can help you with self-promotion including visualising how you want to come across; Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) tools are very useful to enable you to feel confident. A bizarre sounding description belies practical simple tools to help people to be aware of how they feel and change and improve to achieve a more resourceful state. This is especially useful in situations when people feel less comfortable than normal, e.g. dealing with a bullying boss, an unreasonable client or promoting themselves to secure partnership. Simply by accessing memories in the past when you felt confident or comfortable, it is possible to recreate the sense of confidence even in a completely unrelated context. By acting with confidence you can make self-promotion second nature - fake it before you make it!

Use experts

To leap quickly up the learning curve, consult experts who can help you to create a strategy that both feels comfortable and that works for you. e.g. life coach, image consultant, personal marketing consultant etc

Expand your networks

Women often have many social friendship networks, including school, NCT and the gym/sports club etc, and whilst these can be very useful, they can be primarily female rather than diverse. They can reinforce women's natural understated networking style. Trying mixed sex or specialist networks such as BNI (Business Network International) or even Toastmasters - a public speaking club - to get specific feedback about how you come across, can be invaluable and increase confidence. At BNI, an educational organisation, you stand up each week for 60 secs and promote yourself and your firm. You cannot fail to feel more comfortable with so much practice in such a structure! Also, as only one person is allowed from each profession in each group, you don't need to be self conscious about what you say, as there will be no competitors present.

Broaden your remit in your firm and influence where it matters

Take an interest in problems that you are not responsible for; those that concern the whole firm e.g. attracting and retaining talent or corporate social responsibility and raise your profile indirectly. If you have a cause, it can take the pressure off you. In addition, the results of your efforts will be visible for all to see if you choose an issue high on your firm's agenda.

Develop champions/sponsors

During your career, create and develop relationships with key stakeholders who will positively influence other key stakeholders on your behalf, so you don't have to. Some people make careers out of other people promoting them. If you choose wisely and support your supporter, you can benefit from their introductions and influence amongst the people who matter.

Balanced practise teams

In some law firms, your colleague in your own practise group can be your biggest competitor. This structure is divisive and can be especially prevalent when there is a dominance of males, who are competitive by nature. It would make much better sense to have balanced teams of male and female partners working together and playing to their strengths. Men could help the women to take more risk securing short-term deals, whilst women could help men to build rapport and relationships with clients and other departments internally.

Indirect approach

Selling the benefits of using them rather than singing their own praises directly can work better for women because they feel more comfortable. Imagine being a consultant to yourself. What would you recommend then in terms of approaching self-promotion?

Female friendly network forums Nothing to lose approach

Try different things and refine and hone your approach to promoting yourself. Law is very right and wrong, marketing is greyer and harder to quantify. The best way to learn what works is to try different things and see what works for you. Why not attend networking events with a couple of colleagues who you trust? Support each other and give feedback to each other to learn and make immediate changes.

Word that fits

If you have an issue with the words 'self promotion', 'marketing' or 'networking', every time you think or speak them, you are reinforcing a negative and are likely to avoid it. Create a phrase that resonates with you. For example, if you are motivated to get a promotion because it will mean that you can afford to pay off your mortgage. Giving you peace of mind, then call self-promotion your 'Mortgage busting' project.

Focus on others not you

Think about the benefits of how you can help others; by doing this it takes the attention off you. Women can feel uncomfortable blowing their own trumpet and focusing on what's in it for them. Sharing the benefits i.e. the sizzle rather than focusing on the sausage (you), can work well. You will also find that you are doing marketing naturally, as needs and benefits are what marketing is all about.

Don't leave an early lucky break to chance, plan it

Many people fall into their career and don't think about where they want to be or how to get there. Make time to picture where you want to be and plan your career moves ahead of time. By doing this you can promote yourself little and often, rather than storing it all up to close to the time when you want something. This is what can make self-promotion feel selfish.

Modelling

Notice which females you know who are good at self-promotion. Spend time observing them and notice how they

approach it. Is it what they say? Is it how they say it? Is it how they carry themselves? Is it their smile or laugh? Try different things and see what works for you. Make it your own unique style, but take the best of their approach if it works.

Vicious circle down or virtuous circle up?

Law firms need women in senior managing partner positions to help them grow and change. Relationship building is everything in life and business, especially when people are the only differentiator between firms

You can become comfortable about promoting yourself, I promise. The cost of not promoting yourself is too much to contemplate; getting passed over for promotion; being paid less than men; others taking the credit for your hard work. At a professional level, the cost of female solicitors not promoting themselves is unthinkable. It's the drain of female brain from a profession that needs to change, not just small change but also a paradigm shift kind of change. The level of thinking that created a problem cannot be used to create new thinking. It's time for women to lead the way.

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