

## Closing Argument > column



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### My father's advice

I have a unique window into law firm life — not only am I a partner at a large law firm, but so are my father, brother and husband. My father was able to rise to the top of his law firm and legal community during his 45-year career. As I prepare to attend one of a series of events honoring him, I think about the seminal lesson he taught me about being a lawyer: In order to succeed, you must be able to get clients and keep clients. How to do that in today's world seems more challenging than ever, but following my father's timeless principles helps to guide me in my own client work.

**1. Always leave a conversation knowing more about the other person than they know about you.** Clients who take the time to meet with you do not want to hear all about your achievements or work; they are more interested in having you listen carefully to their own issues. Being a good advocate requires you to be focused on what a client is telling you rather than what you think they are hearing about your own experience. In today's world, where communications are often typed out quickly via e-mail or text, listening seems to be an antiquated concept, but nothing replaces sitting down with a client and talking through their problems and strategizing about how you can help them. That concept also goes for attorneys discussing cases with attorneys assisting them. This allows you to fully glean what is going on with a case and the work that another attorney is performing for you. In either case, a face-to-face conversation works best.

**2. Be creative and flexible.** Both the law and what clients need from their lawyers are in constant flux. Make sure that you keep up with new developments and trends in the law in addition to new sources of legal authority.

For my father, that was enlarging his focus from environmental law to other areas. For me, that means keeping up with the rapidly changing laws in the area of employment, restrictive covenant and class-action work so that when my clients call me with a question about their employees, which happens on an almost daily basis, I can answer those questions as quickly and thoroughly as possible. Being creative and flexible may also mean employing alternative fee arrangements and new marketing methods. Simply having your biography up on your firm's website is not enough anymore. Attorneys must be able to articulate the value they bring to clients, speak and write articles on subjects of interest and be credentialed through third-party legal directories.

**3. Make the client feel like they are your only client.** Having a robust litigation practice means that you are often tied up in depositions or at court. However, making every effort to respond to clients as quickly as possible is essential. Clients do not want to hear about how busy you are with other clients; they want answers to their questions. Being on trial makes this rule especially difficult to follow, so I have my secretary ready to refer questions to other attorneys if I really cannot be available, and I always endeavor to catch up on calls before the end of the day.

**4. Use what makes you unique to form beneficial connections.** My father did this by joining and leading various groups for causes he believed in, including bar association groups with like-minded attorneys. The common interests of these groups allowed my father to form ties with others, resulting in clients and colleagues who have supported him throughout his career. In the same vein, I am a member of the board of directors of the

Coalition of Women in Law, a group of female attorneys in law firms and corporations who work together to increase the number of successful women in the legal profession. We also reach out to women in law school and provide programming and mentoring to help them in navigating their legal careers. Through this group, I have had the privilege of getting to know and learning from many successful female attorneys.

**5. Always stop a fight, never start a fight.** Clients do not want to be in litigation if they can avoid it. Preventing litigation can be as easy as providing a disgruntled employee with the opportunity to speak with management about their situation, putting in place an updated employee handbook or training on best practices in employment law.

**6. Learn from and surround yourself with other skilled attorneys.** If you are not an expert in the area of law in which your client needs help, do not hesitate to consult with other attorneys.

**7. Always use correct grammar.** Do not misuse pronouns and when you construct a sentence, make sure to complete that sentence.

**8. Be aggressive, but always ethical.** Being a lawyer at a law firm often requires aggressive advocacy. Keep in mind, however, that no matter how tough the fight, you must remain honest and ethical at all times. That is how my father has practiced law, that is how he lives his life and that is how I endeavor to live mine.

Each day, no matter how rapidly the law and law firm life is changing, I work with my father's guiding principles and they make me a better lawyer for my clients, a better shareholder at my law firm and a better citizen of the legal community. ■

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