



## Rainmaking 101: Listening & Speaking

By: Mark Powers & Shawn McNalis



**L**istening and speaking – actions that we normally think of as automatic and commonplace – take on new dimensions when we realize they are the very essence of “word-of-mouth” marketing. Whether the conversation is work related, involves another professional or happens in a social situation, what you say and how you say it helps others see you as trustworthy. And being considered trustworthy is key to your professional success. Fortunately, there are various techniques to turn everyday conversations into conversations that will build trust, deepen rapport and communicate key messages.

If you’ve been following these columns and are taking the recommended actions, you’ve already determined not only who your prospective clients are, but also who influences them. This completes the “Who To Talk To” part of the process. But now that you know who to talk to, what do you say? How do you take ordinary conversation and make it work for you in the context of marketing? And how do you do it without sounding like you are reciting something from a script?

The conversational strategies we teach are simple: each serves a specific purpose and has a desired outcome. Conversation left to chance yields unpredictable results; words in specific combinations have power. Just like shouting, “Help, the building is burning!” will elicit a predictable response, so can words used for marketing purposes. These conversational strategies have been road tested by hundreds of attorneys, and they work.

Over the years, we’ve put together the following list of the most important conversational strategies for marketing: the art of asking questions; the Interview; Storytelling (the stealth bomber of marketing); the Laser talk; the active use of acknowledgment; educating and upgrading conversations and powerful introductions. For now, we’ll start with the easiest strategy and a strategy that is adaptable to almost any setting, be it a new client meeting or a party down the street. It is the art of asking questions and your

conversation won’t sound canned because you improvise the script as you go.

### Trust Is Key

In order for clients to hire you and to refer other clients to your firm they must trust you. Trust is developed and earned over time, but the process starts with the way you communicate. Let’s take the initial client interview. Clients will decide whether or not to trust you based largely on how you communicate with them. Most clients have no real ability to judge the quality of your legal work – all but the most sophisticated clients have no experience in this area. But most clients are very experienced in interacting with other human beings and will bring all of that experience to bear in deciding whether or not you are trustworthy. The old adage, “They don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care,” addresses this issue. In order for a client to feel cared for, they have to tell their story and they have to feel you are interested in them. If you care and are interested you’ll ask a lot of questions about them -- and their matter.

How does the art of asking questions apply to social situations and, for that matter, marketing in general? As a general rule, no matter whom you meet, or where you are, people love to talk about themselves. Make it a point to ask questions of a personal nature, but don’t be overly intrusive. According to studies focused on the length of time that it takes to develop rapport, it takes about 12 minutes of conversation for a person to warm up to you and begin to trust you. Engaging someone in a conversation about themselves is an easy way to begin building trust. Avoid cross-examining them and try to remember that almost everyone has an interesting story beneath whatever exterior façade they present to the world.

Acceptable questions include those about peoples’ lives: what is important to them and why. Find out if they are married, whether they have children and what their chil-

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dren's names and ages are. Find out about their hobbies or interests. Are they into sports? Where did they go to college? What type of work do they do? Do they own their own business – what inspired them to be an entrepreneur? Be curious without overstepping the bounds of good manners. You will be able to judge how open they are by the amount of self-disclosure they allow. If they give grudging, one-word answers to your questions, they probably aren't immediately trusting and it will take longer to get to know them. If they give you long, detailed answers, it's an indication that they are beginning to feel trust for you. As you ask these questions and listen to the answers, try to do only 20 to 30 percent of the talking. Allow the person you are getting to know to dominate the conversation. Focus your attention on them exclusively.

The simplest technique for turning a normal conversation into a strategic one is to ask questions. Questions are a powerful tool for building rapport and trust. They help you learn about and form relationships with others. The information you receive and the commonalities you discover will form the foundation for the relationship that is built, one conversation at a time, over a long period. Work on finding out what you have in common with each individual and remember the Rule Of Seven: After about seven encounters with someone they begin to accept you as part of their world. Engaging people by asking questions can help you bridge the gap in the early stages of a relationship so that it can grow into something more substantial.

Use the art of asking questions when you take a referral source out to lunch, talk to a colleague in the courthouse or meet a prospective influencer at a social function. It is a no-fail technique for building what we call, "know, like and trust."

*Mark Powers, President of Atticus, Inc., and Shawn McNalis, co-authored "The Making of a Rainmaker: An Ethical Approach to Marketing for Solo and Small Firm Practitioners," and are featured marketing writers for Lawyers, USA and a number of other publications. To learn more about the work that Atticus does with attorneys or the Atticus Rainmakers™ program, please visit [www.atticsonline.com](http://www.atticsonline.com) or call 352-383-0490 or 888-644-0022.*