



AMERICAN  
BANKRUPTCY  
INSTITUTE

# 2017 Delaware Views from the Bench

*Mid-Level Track*

## **Career-Development Paths**

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## Career-Development Paths for Mid-Level Associates

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Panelists:

The Honorable Kevin Gross – *U.S. Bankruptcy Court (D. Del.)*

Peter Kravitz – *Province, Inc.; Henderson, NV*

Sarah Link Schultz – *Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP; Dallas, TX*

Seth Van Aalten – *Cooley LLP; New York, NY*

## Career-Development Paths for Mid-Level Associates

Primary Topics of Discussion:

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- Best Practices for Developing & Maintaining Clients
  - Creating a Personal Brand
  - Navigating Intra-Firm Politics
  - Identifying Opportunities for Growth
  - Using Business & Personal Opportunities to Achieve Career Goals

## Defining Career Goals

### What are you looking to achieve?

- Make partner?
- Go in-house?
- Non-traditional track?

### Getting there:

- Building and managing relationships
- Developing clients
- Finding a way to stand out

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## Best Practices for Developing and Maintaining Clients

*“Happy people don’t need lawyers.”*

### Being an effective communicator is vital

- Despite legal education’s focus on words and writing, we often don’t think about what we’re saying, or how it may be perceived
- Think: “What does this prospective client need?”
- Good communication makes managing expectations easier
- Communicating clearly can make networking easier for a mid-level associate trying to develop business
- Developing the ability to speak with potential clients about both work-related matters and more casual topics will help with developing clients and maintaining relationships with them

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## Best Practices for Developing and Maintaining Clients

### Networking:

Specialists in legal marketing suggest that firms should have their mid-level associates set specific networking goals, including who they want to meet, potential clients to target, and dates by which to achieve these goals

- Going to networking events and trade shows for various industries can provide a source of potential clients and contacts; reading industry trade journals and business publications (*e.g.*, The Wall Street Journal) can help you maintain an awareness of what is happening in various industries
- Handing out business cards isn't enough; when networking with a potential client, follow up with the new contact within 48 hours
- With email, staying in contact with the potential client or referral source is as simple as sending a short email checking in with them

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## Best Practices for Developing and Maintaining Clients

### Pitching the Client:

Communicate clearly, without jargon

Show them you provide value

- The client has problems, you can provide solutions
- Rather than saying "I'm a bankruptcy lawyer," describe what helping the client would look like

Why should the potential client pick you?

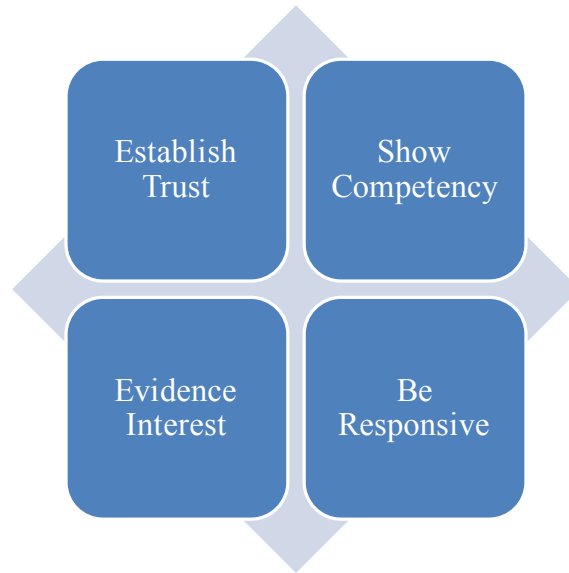
- Your unique skillset
- What sets you apart, your personal brand

Make the client comfortable

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## Best Practices for Developing and Maintaining Clients

Developing the Relationship:



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## Best Practices for Developing and Maintaining Clients

Maintaining Clients:

Maintaining a healthy and effective attorney-client relationship requires a high level of attention from the attorney:

- Try establishing a conferencing schedule and provide guidance to the client (*e.g.*, “it’s your decision, but in my experience, this has been an effective route to take”)
- Being available for the client is vital, particularly in high-stakes and fast-paced proceedings, but being proactive and anticipating what problems the client will have is also important
- When providing legal advice to the client on which route to take, give the client enough time to make an informed decision
  - Providing the client with drafts of pleadings and briefs helps the client stay informed as to the arguments being made in the case and the relevant law
  - If dealing with novel issues or unsettled law, informing the client of the issue’s novelty or the present lack of authority builds trust and can help the client make meaningful decisions
- The above are all instances where an attorney can add real value for the client

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## Best Practices for Developing and Maintaining Clients

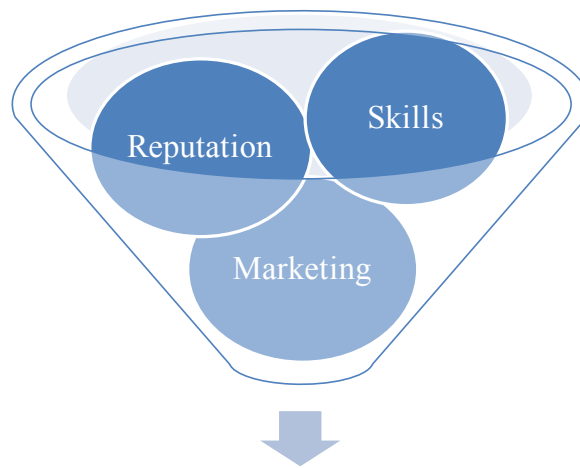
Maintaining the Relationship:



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## Building a Personal Brand

One way to attract clients and make your pitches to them more effective is to build a personal brand



Your Personal Brand

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## Building a Personal Brand

While you acquire a reputation, you build a personal brand, reputation is merely one critical component

A personal brand isn't created all at once, it is developed over time

You can direct your actions to developing your personal brand in a much more active manner than you develop a reputation

A reputation largely happens to you; you build your brand and market it

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## Building a Personal Brand

A personal brand can make the difference in a successful pitch to a potential client

- A personal brand is a way to immediately show potential clients the value that you provide
- A well-defined personal brand can help with making a strong pitch and with selling a potential client on the fact that you're uniquely qualified to assist them

Personal branding provides visibility and can help a mid-level associate stand out, both to partners and potential clients, particularly in an area like bankruptcy and restructuring, where many firms and attorneys provide very similar services

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## Building a Personal Brand

*Much of a lawyer's regular day-to-day activity is conducive to developing a personal brand*

In bankruptcy practice, you can focus on specific areas of work, so instead of just being a “bankruptcy attorney,” you can brand yourself as a mid-level associate with significant experience representing distressed retailers.

- The former is generic, while the latter is specific and informative for a potential client

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## Building a Personal Brand



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## Navigating Intra-Firm Politics

*“Man is by nature a political animal.”*

-Aristotle

An inescapable fact of practicing at a law firm is working with the personalities around you, both with partners and your fellow associates

Unfortunately, a firm’s internal politics can, and often do, act as a stressor, and can lead to poor performance and a difficult work atmosphere

It is vital to your advancement that you learn to navigate the internal politics of your firm or decide you don’t want to and seek out other opportunities

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## Navigating Intra-Firm Politics

Finding and developing a relationship with a mentor is of immense value as you work towards your goals at the firm

### A mentor can:

- Help you avoid or correct problems and mistakes
- Advocate for you
- Provide guidance and help you with developing your personal brand
- Direct you on how to handle certain office personalities

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## Navigating Intra-Firm Politics

Developing a reputation as a good listener can help you steer your way through firm politics (and prevent you from saying something you shouldn't)

Learn to tailor your delivery based on who you're speaking with

Cultivate allies who will advocate for you and support you when you need it

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## Navigating Intra-Firm Politics

Working within the culture of the firm is vital; trying to change the established environment as an associate is a recipe for disaster

If you find yourself in a hostile environment or are concerned about the ethics of a task or request, be sure to document all your interactions – you cannot reach your career goals if you do not protect yourself first

Understanding when to move on to other opportunities is vital to career success

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## Identifying Opportunities for Growth

Finding a mentor can help in more ways than just learning the law and having an advocate; a mentor can also help you identify ways to expand your role at the firm and advance

Early in your career you're typically working on one part of a case, thinking "big picture" can help you find ways to continue your development and work towards your goals

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## Identifying Opportunities for Growth

As you advance in your career, take an inventory of yourself, what can you improve on?

- Become a better marketer?
- Take on large projects, or even whole cases?
- Interact with clients of the firm more?
- Do you have a plan to generate business?
  - Showing you can generate work for the firm can help you stand out and can be vital if your goal is making partner
- Are you happy doing what you're doing?

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## Identifying Opportunities for Growth

Stay aware of emerging issues in your practice area

- Can you leverage these developments to become an expert in a new niche to help you reach your goals?

If you haven't already, developing a business plan can help you identify opportunities for advancement

- Revisit your business plan quarterly to take stock of whether or not you're following through on your plan

You're no longer a junior associate – are there ways that you can use your experience to get more work or to develop new relationships?

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## Using Business & Personal Opportunities to Achieve Career Goals

You'll be presented with business opportunities through your practice, *e.g.*, assisting a partner with hearings and depositions in another city, where you can make connections and contacts, but what about leveraging events and opportunities in your personal life to help you achieve your career goals?

## Using Business & Personal Opportunities to Achieve Career Goals

You have a life outside of work, you can help yourself achieve your career goals by making the activities you enjoy and your leisure time part of your career development

Make your work life and your personal life work in tandem to help achieve your career goals – working towards them shouldn't end when you leave the office

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## Using Business & Personal Opportunities to Achieve Career Goals

Attending a conference? It's a networking opportunity, but also one where you can learn about emerging areas in your field and what clients are looking for

- Think about how you can use the event to get closer to achieving your goals
- Follow up with the people you meet; can you take them golfing? Meet up for a show? Where do your interests align?

Involved in civic associations? Think about how you can use your involvement to reach your career goals

- Do they need legal services?
- Can you develop business contacts through your involvement?

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## Using Business & Personal Opportunities to Achieve Career Goals

Leveraging your interests can be as simple as discovering that you and a client or contact share an interest in a sports team and occasionally sharing articles about the team

- If your client or contact is in town and you're going to a game, invite them

Persistence is key – while you might not be able to take advantage of every opportunity in your business and personal life, if you make it a habit of trying to utilize the opportunities presented to you, you'll be more successful in realizing your goals

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