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Well-balanced attorneys use all muscles

When I was an undersized 13-year-old with not much else to do, my good friend and I took to lifting weights.

Like many boys that age, it was not so much for the physical fitness benefit as it was for the aesthetics.

Naturally, we concentrated on what, in our minds, were the most important features – our chests and arms. We worked relentlessly on curls and bench presses.

One afternoon, as we chugged away in our homemade basement gym, my friend's older brother walked in and just stared at us.

After a few minutes, he offered us some unsolicited advice. "All this upper body work," he said, "and I can knock you over with an empty paper cup."

He then turned and walked up the stairs. Only an older brother can demoralize with such efficiency.

Nevertheless, he drove the point home: We were neglecting the whole for the benefit of just one part.

In the end, we were unbalanced.

I'm not sure an empty paper cup would have done it, but we were certainly top heavy. In a well-balanced private practice, three main areas need development: legal ability, marketing and teamwork.

The practice of law covers a wide swath of topics and is wrought with pitfalls around every turn.

Add that to demands from clients and those higher in the food chain and it can be over-

whelming to a young attorney. As a matter of survival, many of us charge at the biggest threat: the law itself.

However, there is much more to practice than learning the law. Conscious, balanced development is key to healthy career growth.

Your legal skills are your product. No doubt, they must be honed to maximum ability. In that regard, your legal toolbox shouldn't stop at your chosen concentration or practice area. Take advantage of free or low-cost Continuing Legal Education opportunities (you need the credit anyway).

Learning even the basics in various practice areas develops more than just your legal knowledge; it broadens your understanding and opens your field of view.

Practice the law. Take on unfamiliar assignments. Learn from your mentors. Experience the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat.

Those experiences do much to grow your legal knowledge.

True to the "practice" moniker, you will learn by doing. Success and failure alike will add to your arsenal.

Over time and with hard work, your reputation will begin to carry its own weight. With that, your "product" will become more valuable.

But your professional development will require more than just your legal skills.

Just as in developing legal abilities, it takes time to develop marketing skills. You must make the time and work on them.

Again, you can go to your mentors, attend seminars and

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Francisco E. Connell is a principal at Chuhak & Tecson P.C. who focuses his practice on transactional matters and litigation for commercial and banking clients. Connell advises business owners on all types of legal issues, from entity formation to real estate acquisitions to succession planning, and represents lenders in bankruptcy, creditors' rights cases and complex commercial workouts. Prior to earning his law degree, he served as a Chicago police officer for almost 10 years.

read books. Have a plan and stick to it.

There are many solid programs and strategies for marketing, but one size doesn't fit all. Find one that works for you and do it. Undoubtedly, you will experience success and failure. You will be frustrated, rejected and discouraged. Learn and move forward.

Over time, you will find that your marketing skills will develop. Law school gave your "legal" mind a head start, so your "marketing" mind has to catch up. It will be tough at first, but it will get easier with time and effort.

There is strength in numbers. Whether it be staff, clerks, attorneys or co-counsels from other firms, teamwork is essential to success. Law school

tends to foster competition, not teamwork.

While self-sufficiency only makes us stronger, the many aspects of practice make it necessary to rely on others.

As your growth becomes more wholesome, it is even more important to lean on others to help manage your time and efforts.

Bounce ideas off your neighbors. Use law clerks to assist with research projects and utilize staff members to save time and money. Utilize marketing tools provided to you through your firm or through bar associations. Keep in mind that being a team member is not a one-way street.

Understand and appreciate what is being given to you. Reward and return the help whenever possible. Most times, very little in terms of recognition and payback can go a very long way.

Your consideration will pay benefits down the road. When your team feels like someone is invested in them, it is far more likely that they will be invested in you.

Let them know that you will stand with them if they stand with you. Few things are stronger than a unit that works together.

To this day, I hate to work my legs. But, I know I have to do it. When we spend too much time on one thing, everything else tends to weaken. Make sure that your professional development is balanced and built to last.

That way, you'll be able to withstand empty paper cups or whatever else might come your way.