

## Chapter 6

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# Creating Positive Visibility

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### What Is Positive Visibility?

As a first year associate, positive visibility is the combination of having people know who you are *and* having an instant positive view of you. When you think about creating positive visibility over the course of your career, you will think about it in terms of both inside and outside your organization. In addition, both internally and externally, you will want to create a form of positive visibility known as gravitas. As a first year associate, however, focus solely on inside the firm. Your “clients” are very likely going to be more senior associates and partners. Your “job” as a first year associate is to figure out the culture and politics of your group or team and to become a proficient substantive lawyer. Save the task of creating external positive visibility for next year.

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## **Why Do You Want to Be Strategic in Creating Positive Visibility?**

Creating positive visibility is not a tactical project. Be strategic about how you create a view of yourself among those who are more senior than you at the firm. Why do you want to invest in this activity? Senior associates and partners pick the newest members of their teams early and once teams are established, breaking into them can be very difficult. Many new associates are staffed on matters based solely upon their “reputation”: “I’ve heard good things about . . . [on the partner/senior associate grapevine].” When you have a positive reputation, you increase your access to skill-building assignments and opportunities to create social capital with the “right” senior attorneys. In addition, positive visibility creates an opportunity for you to be top of mind or at least make the list of people considered for firm citizenship roles, which facilitates your visibility with attorneys with whom you may never have an opportunity to do a substantive project.

## **What Does Positive Visibility Look Like As a First Year Associate?**

There are many ways to create positive visibility from the start. Here are a few ideas for you to consider and implement immediately:

1. Lawyers “sell” judgment. Whether you like it or not, how you dress impacts other people’s impression of your judgment. Look around you at the firm. Until you have established standing through superior performance, “fit in” by dressing in a way that is consistent with those more senior than you in your group or on your team.

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2. Come to meetings prepared. Ask another associate who has experience with the team or working with the partner about the “rules” for participating in meetings so that you can participate in a manner that will be viewed as appropriate. Participate in the pre-meeting banter—it helps create the impression that you communicate in a manner that enhances relationships. Only use your electronics if others are doing so.
3. Do some due diligence on the members of the team and the client. Every team has its own dynamic, and understanding the culture and politics of the team will help you create a positive impression.
4. Seek constructive feedback at the first appropriate interval. Ask the person who is immediately supervising you to provide an indication of what you are doing well and what you could do differently to be more effective. Implement the feedback and express gratitude for the non-billable minutes that were invested in you.
5. Seek out informal mentoring opportunities both with those with whom you are working and those who are “like” you, however you define that concept. If your firm has a formal mentoring program, invest the time in being very proactive in establishing a relationship with the mentor you are assigned.
6. Say yes to opportunities that are offered to you to create social capital. Accept the invitations to go to lunch, have a beer, drive a partner to a meeting, etc.
7. Begin to have conversations with more senior associates about what the appropriate skill set benchmarks are for your practice area. You need to under-

stand what substantive skills are necessary for you to be valuable to the clients (most of whom will be internal as a first year) and to be on track to matriculate. It is up to you to create a plan to seek out the “right” skill-building assignments. That action will be seen by others as you “taking ownership” of your career.

8. Use non-billable time to observe more senior lawyers “in action” on substantive matters, in client relationship activities, in business development, and in the activities they do to create external positive visibility and gravitas. Take full advantage of any programs supported by the firm for modeling opportunities.
9. Raise your hand and volunteer. Doing so will be seen as “taking initiative.” Approach such opportunities with the same rigor that you would a billable project: do a high-quality, timely job on the project.
10. Work in the office, instead of remotely. Until you have established a solid reputation, it is important for people to see your face and be able to walk into your office and ask a question or give you an assignment.
11. Model your in-office work hours on those worked by more senior members of the team. You have to earn standing before you can work when and where it is most convenient for you. Do not underestimate the judgments that will be made if, for example, you do not get into the office until 10 a.m., even if you turn every assignment in on time.

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12. Turn assignments in early, not just on time. Do things as soon as you get them. Create a reputation for saying yes and being responsive.
13. Provide updates to those with whom you are working that are short, punchy, and positive. If you get an assignment that is taking longer than expected, check in with the attorney supervising you. One of the worst things you can do as a first year is earn the reputation as someone who “shocks” with the number of hours billed on an assignment.
14. Go to firm social events. Talk to people you do not know, as opposed to hanging out with your friends. While it is fine to have a drink, do not get drunk or create a reputation that you are a heavy drinker. Only eat food that allows you to do so without wearing it.
15. Meet the others who work on your floor. It is your responsibility to go to their offices and introduce yourself. Make this effort as soon as you arrive.
16. Make a point of dropping by the offices of those attorneys with whom you are working. Do not remain a faceless name on an email distribution list.
17. Do not verbally abuse support staff. Be polite and civil to everyone, not just the lawyers.
18. Take advantage of training opportunities provided by your practice group and the firm. Even though these are non-billable activities, they will be high-value opportunities to enhance your skill set early.
19. Make sure you remain on pace to meet/exceed your billable hour target. If you are not on pace, seek more work early and often until you have solved this

problem. People will assume that you have a “quality” issue if you are not as busy as your peers.

20. Smile and greet people when you see them in the hall or on the elevator. As a new person, you have the opportunity to establish a reputation and you would be surprised how far a “hello” will get you.

## **When Do You Focus on Creating Positive Visibility?**

You should start thinking strategically about creating positive visibility before your first day at the firm. Being a first year associate is overwhelming because there is so much to learn. Walk into your new role with a clear idea of what you will do to create positive visibility so that you are ready to integrate these ideas into what is sure to be a hectic first few months.