

3 Ways to Grow Your Standing at Your Firm





We all want it.

Don't we? The status and prestige that comes with success? With being significant? Express the desire to grow your standing out loud though and it's viewed as vain. It's the truth though isn't it?

Status is a good thing believe it or not.

It's a helpful tool that enables you to do what others around you can't. You're able to reap rewards your peers can only dream about. It's a driver, a motivator for success.

And it's inevitable.

Your social standing is a value signal

This is the part many professionals mix up.

They confuse people with performance. This confusion *seemingly* creates a kind of social schizophrenia. Our culture makes statements like "everyone has value." Then we turn around and reward people with high status jobs (e.g. attorney, doctor, scientist). We reward them with more than those who work at a fast food

restaurant.

Some people take it further.

They assume they're *better* than those they consider to be beneath them. Which is the driver for all sorts of dysfunctional and oppressive behavior.

Is this true?

Are people with high status better than those without?

Not at all.

It's about your value proposition.

- People are priceless.
- Their jobs are not. They have a fixed value.

A person is irreplaceable. **You** are *irreplaceable*. There has never been a person exactly like you. And there never will be again. You're literally one of a kind.

But you are *not* your job.

It's fairly easy to teach someone to cut grass. It's a valuable skill sure, but there are lots of people who can do it. There are very few people who are both *willing* and **able** to do what you do as an attorney.

Most people *can't* do what you do.

20 to 40 percent of law school students drop out. Another 40 percent of students fail the bar exam on their first try.

It's hard work.

The status and rewards a person receives isn't about their intrinsic value as people. It's about the unique value they're able to *provide*. If they can do things most people can't do, the rewards are greater. Complete a task that anyone can do and the rewards aren't as... well... rewarding.

It's about the value you're contributing, not the people themselves.

Grow your status and you may hurt your career

Status is a deceiver.

Your social standing in your firm, if it's good, lulls you into a false state of confidence. People with status make the same mistake I just mentioned.

They believe it's about them.

They tell themselves they deserve it. It begins to hurt them. Sukhvinder Obhi, a neuroscientist at McMaster University, in Ontario, compared the brains of the powerful and those without power under a transcranial-magnetic-stimulation machine.

[His research](#) shows power and status [corrupts](#) the unprepared.

It behaves like a tumor, impairing the neural processes responsible for empathy. The subtle differences were surprising.

[A 2006 study](#) asked study participants to write the letter **E** on their foreheads for others around them to view. It's a task that requires you to see things from another person's point of view.

Here's what happened.

The powerful were three times more likely to draw the **E** the right way for themselves and backwards to everyone else. Those who weren't powerful did the opposite more often than not.

Ouch.

Status, power, it primes you to ignore peripheral information.

Which is exactly how status destroys careers

Struggle teaches you a secret.

It's the secret to boosting and *preserving* your social standing in your firm. Your status and power doesn't come from you. It comes from those **around you**. It's not an intrinsic part of who you are.

Meaning what?

Status and power is given to the exceptional (you) so you can continue to **serve**. Because at its core, your social standing is about trust.

Distilled to its purest form, it means this:

Your status, and the power that comes with it, is a loan and it must be repaid.

There's only one reason for your increased social standing in the firm. Service. Your employer, co-workers and peers expect you to make things better, for them.

- Co-workers come to you for help and advice
- Partners give you lucrative rewards, incentives and bonuses in exchange for performance
- Your team trusts you to lead (and they follow)
- You're asked to represent the team or the company officially

This also means your firm expects you to:

- Be the rainmaker
- Outperform or fight off competitors
- Raise the profile and status of the firm in the industry at large
- Building, teaching or developing your team. Making them better in some way.
- Achieving results that are quite simply, above and beyond what the average attorney can do.

Burn this into your brain.

Your status and power is a loan. That loan *must* be repaid.

Ignore that long enough and your status and power will be revoked. Allow this to happen and you'll be worse off than when you started. It's important to keep this fact in mind.

Still want it?

Follow a few simple rules to grow your standing

These rules are clear.

They're not at all easy. They take time, require growth and come with serious risks. But the potential payoff is disproportionately **enormous**.

Rule #1: Do what others can't (or won't)

Doing what others can't or won't immediately creates value. In a supply vs. demand economy, we're intrinsically drawn to results. Doing what others can't or won't is bigger in the minds of those who refuse to try.

Here are a few examples:

- Connect with top out-of-sight influencers and power brokers.
- Access information others can't find, get to or reach.
- Partner with influencers and platforms that generate a significant and disproportionate amount of revenue for you and your firm.
- Create new ideas, tools or resources that produce more money for firm (and you) with minimal effort.
- Create fascination and desire with potential clients.
- Create openings and opportunities in situations where those around you have failed.
- Deliver wins in an unwinnable situation

See what I mean?

It's hard enough meeting billable hour deadlines. How on earth are you supposed to make all of this happen?

It's simple.

You [10x your productivity], creating the extra free time you need to get these results.

Rule #2: Always provide value

I use [Peter Thiel](#)'s value formula. It's a consistent and straightforward representation of how the world works. The formula goes like this:

1. *Create **X** dollars of value* for [clients, partners and shareholders].
2. *Capture **Y** percent of X.*

That's it.

When it comes to providing value, it's only limit is your imagination. As long as it's valued by others and it's legal/ethical it's fair game.

Here's a few examples:

- You can write for distinguished sites like [Blue Sky](#) and the Wall Street Journal's [Law blog](#).
- Become a prolific thought leader, blogging on a wide variety of high traffic, high profile, or partnership oriented sites.
- Syndicate your content across a wider variety of sites online.
- Take on public facing, noteworthy cases with a slim chance of victory. Then **win**.
- Become a rainmaker by partnering up with platforms like [Martindale](#), [Avvo](#), or [AttorneyPages](#). Platforms that attract a significant amount of clients.
- Come up with new ways to bring more money to the firm.
- Create free quizzes, software, tools and resources to generate a disproportionate amount of leads. Then share them with the attorneys in your firm. Maintain control of your lead generators.
- Connect with power brokers, key influencers, celebrities and leaders. Then, when relevant, work to connect them with those at your firm who are worthy of that trust.
- Become an information broker. Gain access to information that's difficult or impossible for others around you to get. Create systems and procedures that enable you to find the exact information people need, when they need it.

Your goal should be simple.

Become so valuable to your firm that it's incredibly and brutally painful for them to lose you. Create enough value to elevate their position as a firm. This gives them the opportunity to create the amazing results they desperately want.

Deliver value consistently.

Do it with the understanding that your new found status and power are loans that must be repaid.

Rule #3: Take care of your audience

People are sensitive.

It's a general rule to follow. It's a wise idea to assume that your clients, peers, co-workers and employers are sensitive to the same things. We're all a bit sensitive to:

- Insults
- Threats
- Bullying

- Abuse
- Humiliation

Use these tools sparingly if at all. The circumstances that require these strategies are *exceedingly* rare. It's not as easy to avoid making these mistakes as you might think.

It's actually quite common.

People around you are often offended by things you aren't even responsible for. Some of these people may cast blame, secretly nursing a grudge.

Here are some straightforward ways to avoid making that mistake:

1. **Don't ghost or ignore people.** Ignoring texts, emails and instant messages harms the relationship. Silence is the worst insult possible. It trains those around you to fill in the blanks. Which of course means they'll assume the worst.
2. **Don't assert your power over others.** At any given time, and in any given conversation, one person will always be more successful than another. Casually mentioning the large bonus check you received stings when the associate you're talking to didn't get one.
3. **Pay your debts.** Most people collect relational and social stamps. They do good with the expectation of return. What's worse, the value of the good deed *goes up* in a **giver's** mind and *down* in the *recipient's*. Consistently expressing gratitude for the things others have done for you. It's a simple and easy way to avoid resentment due to social and relational debts.
4. **Don't waste their time.** It's important to zealously guard your time. It's just as important to guard the time of those around you. Simply saying "*I don't want to waste your time*" in a conversation is enough to let people know you value *them* personally and you value *their* time.
5. **Don't think they're okay with it, just because you are.** Your values aren't their values. People have their own way of doing things. Imagine that an associate decided to borrow several items from your desk without asking because they'd be okay with it. Then, when confronted, they mentioned it's not a big deal and told you to let it go? Infuriating right? That's how many people feel with this assumption.

It really comes down to this.

Know your audience. If you're a junior partner, be aware of the fact that senior partners may be condescending from time to time. Interns may fawn all over you, eager for any of your attention. Prospective clients may feel intimidated and express false bravado.

There's a simple rule you can follow to take care of your audience.

Build them up.

That's pretty straightforward right? This doesn't mean you morph into a brownnoser. It also doesn't mean that you accept abusive or dysfunctional behavior.

Acknowledge their value, as a human being, as equal to your own.

Some people are driven by agreeableness and social pleasantries. Others loathe chit chat preferring that you "get to the point."

Do so.

Meet people where they are.

What if your social standing doesn't matter?

It *always* matters.

Your clients, the public, your peers, everyone around you relies on it. Your social standing is a measuring stick. A clear point of distinction that outlines your place in the dominance hierarchy.

- If you're **low** on the totem pole, work is easy but life harder.
- If you're **high** on the totem pole, work is hard, but life is easier.

There's suffering either way.

That's the beautiful part about your social standing. We live in a culture where your rank matters. But unlike other cultures, you're free to choose.

What will you choose?

We all want the status and prestige that comes with success.

There's nothing wrong with that.

The need for significance is a normal and legitimate human need. It's not a vain or unworthy pursuit. It's about you. You're intrinsically valuable. There's no one else like you. Improving your social standing gives you the ability to show that your work is valuable.

Because your social standing is a value signal.

You are priceless. Your job on the other hand has a fixed value. You have everything you need to increase that value *as you see fit*. To create the life and the opportunities you want Now.

But you have to choose.

Make the right moves and you'll reap rewards your peers can only dream about. Use value as a driver, a motivator for success and you'll see growing your social standing is *inevitable*.

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