

The Opportunity Maker

Reviewed by Ron Pol*

I had no idea why I was asked to review a book, which seemed to be all about self-promotion for lawyers. Elsewhere the author is painted as an unashamedly successful self-promoter and, in the book, Ari Kaplan reveals that he has authored hundreds of published articles. A glimmer of self-realisation emerged: I have done likewise, in legal and business publications around the world. Was I similarly afflicted, blighted with a self-promotion disease; and perhaps in need of some sort of therapy? Probably not, as it turns out (or at least not for this reason).

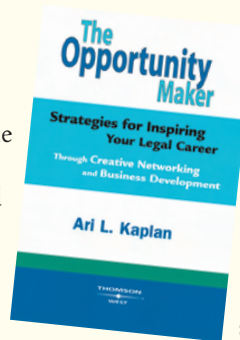
Although even Kaplan describes “the science of self-promotion”, his book is not really about self-promotion at all, at least in the sense of gratuitous self-aggrandisement. Others who have similarly contributed to open debate in legal publications will recognise the book as a practical toolkit for helping lawyers develop and share their expertise and knowledge with colleagues, clients and prospective clients. And, in keeping more with American frankness than the Anglo-Saxon reserve on this side of the Pacific, Kaplan is unashamedly candid about the personal or professional brand development that follows.

With assiduously numbered sections and subsections, the author addresses

the mechanics of rainmaking and getting published, creative ways to connect with clients, the value of blogging even as early as at law school, finding a good mentor, networking, profile raising, and more, including the need always to be genuine. “Make friends, not contacts,” he urges readers.

The book has some minor irritants (labelling the sidebars “sidebar” seems unnecessary, and strident commands “students take note” might irritate students and non-students alike). Some suggestions are also so basic as to appear fatuous (“when meeting people, be positive and enthusiastic”), but perhaps this is simply a function of trying to provide as many tips as possible, from which readers can select those that particularly resonate with them. The heavily numbered table of contents is actually therefore quite useful; it is easy simply to dip in and out for sections of particular relevance from time to time.

It is, however, a real pity that Kaplan has targeted the book mostly at law students and lawyers entering the profession. Many of his points have equal application to more senior lawyers, especially those for whom work has traditionally simply rolled in the door without much thought for how it came to arrive on their desk. For many of



these lawyers, those days are rapidly coming to an end. More than ever before it is important to know what it is that draws clients to your particular door, and to have a welcome mat and light to guide their way, lest they stumble and end up next door.

With a recession already claiming thousands of lawyers’ jobs around the world, and tightening purse strings ushering in a new age of client reluctance to use lawyers, or to pay the heady fees of less than a year ago, the lessons in this book are especially timely. Developing your personal brand and deepening client relationships is not only for new lawyers; it is equally useful for those of us somewhat craggier and longer in the tooth, even for those like Kaplan with hundreds of published articles already.

However, a countless majority of lawyers have silently toiled unseen at their desks, often on work that would be of tremendous interest and value to their colleagues, prospective clients and the public. If this book helps a few of them to share their experiences and enrich the development of the legal profession – and in the process help develop their personal and professional brand (and perhaps even help burnish the brand ‘lawyer’ itself) – it would provide a useful addition to the business development or personal growth sections of lawyers’ bookshelves.

The Opportunity Maker: Strategies for Inspiring Your Legal Career through creative networking and business development by Ari L Kaplan, Thomson West, 2008. ISBN 978 0314194428. Paperback 210pp. RRP \$55. Available at UBS University Bookshop, Auckland.

*Ron Pol is a Wellington lawyer and the director of legal professional services consultancy Team Factors Ltd, www.teamfactors.com

Spotlight on sustainability

A *Property Rights and Sustainability* conference will be held at Auckland University on 16-18 April.

Keynote speaker Judge Christopher Weeramantry, a former judge of the International Court of Justice, will speak on the evening of the first day. Judge Weeramantry is renowned for his progressive judgments in the areas of the environment, human rights, peace and nuclear weapons.

Other confirmed speakers include Professors Eric Freyfogle, Ronald Engel

and Tony Arnold from the USA, and Sharon Beder from Australia.

The conference, organised by the Auckland University-based New Zealand Centre for Environmental Law, has the support of the New Zealand Law Foundation, Federated Farmers and other sponsors.

More information and enrolment is available at www.nzcel-conf.auckland.ac.nz or by contacting the conference organiser, Jane Kilgour, at k.j.kilgour@paradise.net.nz