

# Make It Rain: June Pineda Hoidal

[Betsy A Miller](#) and [June Pineda Hoidal](#)

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Practice Management

Woman Rainmakers

## Summary

- Rainmaking at a plaintiff-side firm requires a mix of art and science in picking the right cases and knowing how to build them.
- Collaboration also is critical – doing great work is not enough, you also must be great to work with.
- Involving associates in case selection from the start is key to building the next generation of rainmakers.



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**June Pineda Hoidal** is a partner at Zimmerman Reed, a Minneapolis-based firm with a national reputation in complex and class action litigation, June champions the causes of public entities when they are plaintiffs in high-stakes cases. Earlier this year, June served as trial counsel for the state of Minnesota in a three-week, landmark jury trial against tobacco companies for their alleged role in the youth vaping epidemic.

*Q: What makes a successful rainmaker at a plaintiff-side firm?*

**June:** The best plaintiff-side firms work on contingency, which requires different rainmaking skills than those needed at defense firms that generate institutional clients and fees paid by the hour. Not only does the contingency model require a keen eye for risk and efficiency, but we also need to win or successfully resolve the case to be paid *at all*. Many of our cases take years to litigate and require millions of dollars in out-of-pocket costs. So, to generate meaningful revenue for a major plaintiffs' firm, every successful rainmaker needs a finely tuned instinct (art), and a replicable process (science), for identifying and building cases that will become a smart bet for the firm.

My most successful moments have involved two kinds of cases: (1) cases I've identified and built by diligently observing litigation trends and current events; and (2) cases where another firm invited me to join as co-counsel.



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In the first category (cases I've identified and built from the ground up), my commitment to staying informed, both as a perpetual student of the law and a news enthusiast, has played a pivotal role. When I recognize a significant injustice, I look for a legally viable means to address it and, if necessary, make sure that those aggrieved are made aware of their rights. This has led me to developing or expanding practice areas within my firm such as our public client practice. Whether it's straightforward consumer fraud or a highly complex financial fraud matter, my approach remains the same: I focus on finding opportunities to rectify injustices within a framework that ensures I can achieve meaningful financial and behavioral recovery for my clients, while also advocating for the court to award and approve fair compensation for my firm. The court usually must review and approve any proposed fee award, so it is also my job to make sure the court accounts

for the ultimate outcome we achieved for our clients as well as the complexity, effort, and risk undertaken by my firm.

In the second category of cases (where another firm invites me to join their case as co-counsel), I am brought in because of the value I bring to the case. I believe my value proposition is a combination of *doing* great work *and* being great to work *with*. These two skills are both distinct and intertwined, because you can't achieve the best results if you aren't also contributing as a member of a high-functioning team. In my view, being a rainmaker in the plaintiffs' world requires an appreciation and respect for the fact that collaboration is king (or queen!). We tackle complex cases that are too massive and burdensome for any single firm to undertake, given the risks and resources required. To distribute the risk and marshal the necessary resources, partnering up with other firms is a must. But no one will want to team up with you—and, more importantly, no one will want *you* to team up with *them*—if you don't do great work and you're not great to work with.

*Q: Can you elaborate on what “do great work” and “be great to work with” look like?*

**June:** The first is a threshold (nobody wants to work with someone who lacks talent and competence), and the latter is how one plaintiff's lawyer is chosen over another.

Doing great work is straightforward. You have to be on top of your game, well-prepared, curious, disciplined, and capable of bringing valuable insights to the table. Being great to work with is more nuanced. It's certainly true that there are those who, despite having interpersonal skills that leave much to be desired, are invited onto cases because of their successful track record on the merits. But that road is risky, volatile, usually unsustainable, and honestly bad for the profession and the clients in the long term. It's better to build the skills and mindset that support the art of strategic and successful collaboration.

Our cases involve multiple attorneys and staff spread across the country. Those who excel at collaborating in that setting are adept at: sharing information clearly and at appropriate intervals; knowing when to delegate and when to provide direction; supporting their colleagues when the going gets tough; managing conflicts with equanimity; and building rapport with others—all while not hogging the spotlight.

I want to emphasize the importance of never leaving your colleagues in a lurch, because this was a valuable lesson that I learned from a lawyer I asked to co-counsel with *me*. Our case hit a major pothole when the defendant secured a regulatory waiver for the alleged misconduct at issue, which arguably narrowed our clients' claims. Instead of retreating, my co-counsel redoubled their efforts—securing my enduring respect.

So, investing time in building a strong relationship based on trust, communication, and mutual respect is key. It builds goodwill and a strong foundation that is needed when it comes time to have hard conversations, whether it's about tough strategy calls or difficult fee allocations. I've watched a lot of co-counsel relationships fail when this foundation is missing. It's an important part of what keeps colleagues coming back to me and my firm. We view our relationships as long-term and place importance on being recognized as honest brokers, hard workers, and top-notch litigators. As the saying goes, it takes a lifetime to build a reputation but just a few bad choices to ruin one.

*Q: How can plaintiff-side firms better prepare lawyers to become successful rainmakers?*

**June:** We should involve associates in critical discussions from the get-go, including the vetting process on whether to take a case. Given the nature of the cases we handle—complex, large, and resource-intensive—it's critical to ask the hard questions before diving in, such as:

- Has a significant injustice affected numerous people?
- Is there a legal avenue to right that wrong?
- Why is this case important?
- How does the case align with our firm's mission and fiscal responsibilities to its personnel?
- And, on a personal level, I always ask: "Am I willing to dedicate the next five years of my life to this?"

If we want to train a deep bench of future rainmakers, we need to include associates in conversations about case selection. And that's something we've been trying to do at my firm. While it's vital to identify those cases with a high probability of success, it's just as important to recognize those that aren't worth pursuing.

**Q: What advice do you have for women lawyers aspiring to be rainmakers?**

**June:** Find yourself an advocate. Someone in your corner who genuinely believes in your growth and development. While firms should certainly do more in playing matchmaker, remember that it's also on you to find these invaluable guides who are willing to take you under their legal wing. True mentorship is not handed out like candy on Halloween. You've got to earn it. The most effective way to do that is to show your value by making your



senior colleague's life easier. You do that by proving yourself to be a trustworthy deputy, through hard work, excellent work product, a zeal and curiosity to learn more, and with a track record of good judgment. And you should always be asking yourself, "How can I add value to this case, this relationship, and my firm?" Nobody expects a junior lawyer to have all the answers; what we are looking for are the signs that the junior lawyer is a smart investment for *our* investment of time and effort as a committed mentor. When you consistently deliver growth on a trajectory toward excellence, senior colleagues will naturally want to invest in your success.

*Q: Describe your rainmaking style in three words.*

**June:** Quality. Collaboration. Persistence.

## Authors

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Betsy A. Miller chairs Cohen Milstein's Public Client practice, where she serves as outside counsel to state attorneys general in select investigations and litigation. Formerly the Chief of Staff and Senior Counsel at the...

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### June Pineda Hoidal

June Pineda Hoidal, a partner at Zimmerman Reed, focuses her practice on representing public entities as plaintiffs in complex litigation. June also leads and manages the firm's cases involving securities and financial fraud,...

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