

NETWORKING MADE EASY

Handout Series #9

Networking is not about “using people,” “schmoozing” or “brown-nosing.” It is about meeting and talking to people with similar goals and interests so that you can gather information that will help you direct your own career and achieve your own goals. By networking within the legal community, you are simply joining the “legal club” to learn more about the practice of law and career opportunities in the law. Networking will remain an integral part of your professional life as a way to make new friends and professional contacts, learn about other practice areas and career opportunities, promote yourself and your law firm, obtain new clients, establish new relationships, increase your own self-confidence and generally have fun! The following simple and practical tips will help you to become an expert “networker” with minimum stress.

WHY NETWORK?

1. 90% of all jobs, legal and otherwise, are unadvertised. Networking puts you in touch with people who know about those unadvertised opportunities.
2. Networking gives you a personal edge in your job search process that will help you stand out from the crowd. Good networking skills can help you overcome mediocre grades and make you into a strong job candidate, even if your paper credentials are not as strong as you would like.
3. By far the greatest number of jobs are obtained through personal contacts. Mass mailings simply do not pay off and should be avoided (Targeted mailings are better, but are most effective when used along with networking).
4. Learning networking skills now will not only help you get your first summer associate job, but will help you throughout your career as a lawyer.

STEP-BY-STEP NETWORKING TIPS

START WITH WHO YOU KNOW

Tell everyone you know that you are looking for a legal position and that you would like to meet and speak with professionals in the field. This means telling your family, friends, casual acquaintances, professors, doctors, teaching assistants, college alumni and ex-employers. Take advantage of the Alumni Career Resources offered by the CDO. These are McGeorge graduates who have volunteered to talk to students and answer their questions. You can use this group to springboard to other contacts and gradually build your own networking circle. Since it is generally more comfortable to talk with those you already know or with whom you have a connection, start with people in this category. For persons who are more difficult to reach, try a targeted mailing and ask for an informational interview.

An informational interview allows you to ask questions that you could not ask in a formal job interview and to gain valuable insights into the realities of different practice areas and how to become employed in those areas. Since informational interviews sometimes turn into job interviews and job offers, this is an activity with a high payoff. More details about informational interviewing are contained in the CDO handout entitled *Finding Your Way Into the Hidden Job Market*.

VOLUNTEER, VOLUNTEER, AND THEN VOLUNTEER SOME MORE

For anyone who is uncomfortable with the idea of direct networking, volunteering can be a great way to become known in the legal community. It also conveys a sense of initiative, enthusiasm and dedication.

Volunteering Suggestions:

1. Volunteer to help out with events sponsored by a local or special interest bar association.
2. Volunteer to participate in or establish a speaker's bureau, either in your law school or elsewhere. Help organize a career panel or area of legal practice panel that interests you. The CDO can help with this.
3. Volunteer to help out at school receptions for alumni or other non-student events.
4. Volunteer to help out wherever your dream job is.
5. Volunteer to help out with civic, charitable or religious groups or events that interest you.

At any of the functions described above, you may meet lawyers or people who know lawyers. You will be doing something enjoyable and something that makes a difference, and the enthusiasm and confidence you show will make your networking that much stronger.

ATTEND LAW-RELATED FUNCTIONS OF THE BAR ASSOCIATION, SCHOOL, INNS OF COURT, OR OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Prepare for the Event

1. Prepare yourself mentally for the event so that you will be able to exude self-confidence and enthusiasm.
2. Prepare a 30 second commercial for yourself to use when meeting people. This should include your name, that you are a current law student, and some statement to make you memorable or interesting, or at least to break the ice, e.g., “Hello, my name is _____, I am in my second year of law school at McGeorge, and I am trying to set a new record for number of Bar related events attended by a second year law student.”

Register for the Event, Then Attend It

1. If there is a charge to attend, register and pay in advance so that you have made a commitment to going.
2. Consider bringing a friend along as a way to double the number of contacts you can make, but agree ahead of time to split up so that you will not talk to each other all night instead of meeting new people.

EVENT STRATEGIES

1. Arrive at the event on time. This will allow you to maximize the time available to meet new people.
2. Set a goal of meeting and gathering business cards from at least five people at every event.
3. If you are given a name tag to wear, place it on your right, rather than left, lapel. This way, it will be directly in a person’s line of vision when you are shaking hands. Be sure to give everyone you meet a firm handshake. If you are carrying a beverage, carry it in your left hand wrapped in a napkin so that your right hand will not feel cold and clammy when you offer a handshake.
4. If you arrive at an event alone, look for anyone who is not already engaged in a conversation, make eye contact, and then introduce yourself to that person, using your 30 second commercial.
5. If you are introducing someone else to a third person, the rule is to present the lower ranked person to the higher ranked person, e.g., “Ms. Senior Partner, may I present Mr. New Associate.” (Note that a person’s rank is defined by the setting in which you find yourself; this may mean making a judgment call).

6. Ask each person you meet questions that will get them talking about themselves (such as “and listen for common areas of interest to discuss. Examples of topics to develop are the event you are attending (or the sponsoring organization), the person’s firm or practice area, current cultural or sports events, or current news events.
7. Try to remember the names of the people you meet. The best way to do this is by repeating a person’s name two or three times as a natural part of your conversation.
8. Smile often, and convey genuine interest in the other person and in what is being said.
9. If you wish to enter a conversation that is already taking place, walk up to the group, make eye contact with those speaking, listen to what is being said, and then introduce yourself and ask an appropriate question when there is a break in the conversation.
10. When you are ready to exit a conversation, let the other person or persons know that you are happy to have met them, ask for their business card, and move on to the next conversation.

AFTER THE EVENT

1. Write reminder notes on the back of business cards - where and when you met, topics discussed, practice areas, etc.
2. A key to networking is making yourself memorable. Writing thank you notes is a way to make yourself memorable, because so few people do it. A thank you note need be no longer than three sentences:
 - a. Describe the event (“It was a pleasure to speak with you at last week’s bar association luncheon”).
 - b. Describe something that made the event unique (“I truly enjoyed discussing recent developments in intellectual property law with you”).
 - c. State your next action step (“I will call next week to see if you might be available for lunch”).
3. Follow through. If you tell a person you will call in a few days, do it.