

MAKING CONNECTIONS:

NETWORKING YOUR WAY TO CAREER SUCCESS

*“I use not only all the brains I have,
but all I can borrow”*

Woodrow Wilson

“It’s not who you know, it’s who you get to know”

Kimm Walton

NETWORKING DO'S AND DON'TS

MAKE A COMMITMENT

Networking is a lifelong investment in becoming a happy and successful professional. Whatever direction your career takes, building and nurturing relationships will be essential. Commit to investing time and energy in the “people component” of your career.

KNOW WHAT YOU WANT & WHAT'S REASONABLE TO ASK FOR

First, think about who you are as a person and what you really want from your career. Ongoing self-examination is the foundation for successful external exploration.

Then ask yourself what outcome(s) you are hoping for from each networking interaction. Be able to articulate your career goals, to whatever extent you've determined them so far, and what you are asking the person for.

What you may really want is “a job”, but if you say that off the bat, the interaction is likely to end right there. Ask for specific information, suggestions, feedback, and advice.

BE GENUINELY INTERESTED IN OTHERS AND BE A GOOD LISTENER

Networking only works if you sincerely want information and are seriously interested in developing relationships. Showing genuine curiosity will help you draw out what you need to know and at the same time will make people like you.

When you've heard where a person works or what they do, ask follow-up questions. Let others see enthusiasm, interest, concern ...emotions that reflect that you are not just hearing, but listening.

People are pleased and flattered when you refer to something they've told you at an earlier time. It can be about children, pets, trips, music...it doesn't matter what. Work on remembering details of conversations with contacts and make lots of notes after you meet people to review before future meetings.

PRESENT YOURSELF PROFESSIONALLY AND POSITIVELY, BE COURTEOUS

Dress to project a professional image. However informal the person's manner or the occasion seems, remember that you still need to make a positive impression as someone that person would want to recommend to others.

Be pleasant to everybody you come into contact with, whatever their roles in an organization, and treat them with respect.

You may be feeling worried, frustrated, and discouraged in the course of a job search, but you're looking for practical assistance when you network, not sympathy. You will want contacts to have a positive impression of you, so don't share any anger, bitterness, or anxiety in a networking encounter.

Express appreciation for large and small favors, not only through thank you notes but on the spot. Always write, call, or email thanks to people who give you information, advice and referrals. If you actually get a job through a contact you might send flowers, give wine or a small gift, take the person out for a meal ...

GET COMFORTABLE TALKING ABOUT YOUR SKILLS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

We've all been brought up not to brag, especially if we're women. You have a lot to offer and a lot to be proud of.

Develop a one or two minute "pitch" that shows your competence and interest in your target field. What do you want people to remember about you? Think about your training and achievements. Use short sentences and conversational language. We're not talking about a lengthy chronological verbal resume, we're talking about highlighting your major strengths.

TAKE AN ORGANIZED APPROACH

It's trite but true: prior planning prevents poor performance! Map out a plan; calendar things to do. Set achievable goals: x number of calls a week, x number of informational interviews a month, attend x meetings each month.

Keep detailed records of your meetings with people. See sample contact record.

FOLLOW UP, KEEP IN TOUCH WITH PEOPLE YOU'VE TALKED TO

Don't end your contact with an individual at the first conversation. Thank them by letter or email, keep them posted on your progress. People often feel they have to get to know you before they are ready to refer you for a job.

Also, it often happens that someone will get ideas that can help you after they've had a chance to think about it, or having you in their mind makes them pay more attention when they hear about opportunities you might be interested in.

Keep yourself near the surface of their consciousness. If you do it graciously, it's not being a pest. Keep in mind that the initial contact may evolve into a lasting connection.

KEEP EXPANDING YOUR NETWORK

For casual contact networking: tell absolutely everyone you possibly can what you're looking for – not just lawyers, but everyone you know and meet. The list of amazing ways people got leads is endless: conversations on buses and planes, in lines at supermarkets and banks, in dentists' waiting rooms and health club changing rooms. Of course, you need to find natural ways to bring up your objective, but it can be done.

For formalized and planned networking: a big mistake many people make is to stop too soon in making connections from one contact to the next. You've heard of six degrees of separation. Sometimes four or fewer is enough to reach your goal, but not always. Keep asking contacts for names of new referrals. The more people you write, call and meet, the more people helping you toward your goal, the more likely you are to reach it.

Push yourself beyond the first level of people you already know. Surprisingly, acquaintances and strangers can often help more than the people closest to you. Your best friends and close relatives may be more uncomfortable about the impact on their relationship with you if you don't get the job they referred you to. Studies show "weaker ties" are more likely to lead to a job.

BE PATIENT, TRY NOT TO GET DISCOURAGED

Networking doesn't have a structured timeline like a job application with a deadline. Again, if you keep in touch with a contact over time, your "investment" may well pay off, and sometimes in surprising ways.

You are bound to get some refusals, and to encounter some people who are unwilling to meet or talk with you, let alone help you. It's inevitable, so shrug it off and keep going. You can try asking the person if they can suggest someone better, or who might be less busy, for you to talk to. If that doesn't work, try not to personalize such rejections and move on.

THINK IN TERMS OF GIVING AS WELL AS GETTING

You'll be surprised how soon you can make networking mutual. Giving back can be as simple as sending a copy of an article you think a contact would be interested in, or as major as referring a new client. Sometimes you will be "giving back" to the person who helped you, sometimes you'll be giving encouragement, feedback, information, advice, and practical leads to your peers or those coming behind you.

"A stranger is just a friend you haven't met" (Girl Scout Song)

CONTACT RECORD

How you set up your record-keeping system doesn't matter. Doing it thoroughly and consistently does! Options include setting up a binder or a card file or keeping track on your computer. You may want one system for information and one for calendaring past and future contacts. Choose whatever works for you, and commit to keeping it up.

CALENDAR

You need to have a record of when you called, wrote to, emailed, and met with people and a system for prompting you when you need to contact them next. As contacts become friends and mentors, and the relationship becomes more mutual, you will want reminders not only of when to get in touch because you need their help, but of dates like their birthdays or other special events that matter to them.

INFORMATION

You should record as much of the following as possible:

Full Name

Nickname (i.e. "Jim" if preferred over "James")

Title

Organization / Employer

Street Address

Mailing Address If Different

Telephone

Fax

Email

Home Address, Phone, Email if offered to you

Referred by /How Originally Contacted

(person who referred; article in magazine; met at x event, etc)

Notes on person's professional background

(education, jobs, recognition)

Notes on personal background

(hometown, hobbies, interests, family, things you noticed in office)

Other comments

(formal, informal...personality notes that might be helpful to remember)

Topics discussed, information and suggestions provided

Referrals given

Next steps to take

HOW TO WORK A ROOM: NETWORKING AT EVENTS

“WORKING” WHAT ROOMS?

“Working a room” is circulating among people at a gathering with a purpose, being (or seeming) at ease, friendly, and gracious, meeting new people, reconnecting with people you’ve met before. In the career development or job-seeking context, obviously your purpose is making connections and creating openings for future contact.

Where? Any gathering that will help you toward your eventual goals. Bar association meetings - these include county, state and national bars, their sections for specializations and committees working on particular concerns. There are also independent bar associations formed around types of practice (corporate counsel, intellectual property, etc.) and affinity groups (ethnic bars). College and law school alumni gatherings. Continuing education classes. Events hosted by firms or organizations that interest you (open houses, other events if you can get yourself invited). Be creative. Opportunities to meet people are endless.

ADVANCE PREPARATION

Find out what you can about the event, who is coming.

Work up a very short self introduction: “I’m (*your name*) a 1L / 99 grad / second year law student (*formality would depend if you’re talking to lawyers or not*) from UC Davis.” And plan a short spiel about why you’re there: “I’m interested in employment law / Pacific Rim trade / *whatever...or* I want to practice in San Diego and I hoped to meet people here who work in that area, so I could learn a little more about it” (*of course, you will use your own words!*)”

Psych yourself up. Motivate yourself to go and tune out your discomfort at the idea of walking into a room full of strangers. Remind yourself of the potential benefits. If it helps, set yourself a limited goal, such as talking to at least five people and collecting at least three business cards. Think of the people you’ll meet not as strangers, but as people with whom you share a common interest. Ask a friend to go with you if that helps you make yourself go, but promise each other you’ll split up and not just cling together!

Try to make time to read up on current legal issues or other news that would be of interest to people in this group. You’ll have some conversation topics ready.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR TIME

When you arrive, scan the room. Note where the bar and food are located (but plan to talk more than you eat and not to drink much). If you know someone, go say hello. They may be able to introduce you to others. Write your name legibly and large on your nametag.

“Act as if”... Try to be as enthusiastic and confident as you can. If you’re feeling shy and intimidated by others’ credentials, but you still manage to act friendly, upbeat, outgoing, and as if you believe you too have something to offer, you’ll be surprised to find that you will start feeling capable, cheerful and energetic.

Ideally, you will collect business cards, gather information, advice and even leads. But most important is that people have a positive impression of you. If you dwell on your need for a job, or monopolize the conversation, you won't establish the relationships you want and need. Initiate conversations – make eye contact, introduce yourself. Be bold! Move around the room. Circulate. Alternatively, depending on the set up, stay in the area where there's the most traffic (often between the entrance and the food and drinks).

If there is a host, find him or her and introduce yourself. Take the initiative. Introduce yourself to people. Shake hands firmly, looking the person in the eye. To help remember names, be sure you get the name clear when you're introduced or introduce yourself. Repeat the person's name as you speak to them.

Start with ice-breaking conversation. Ask questions about them to get the conversation going, but don't fire off questions so they feel interrogated! Share information about yourself; build a dialogue. Some small talk/starter topics: whether either of you have attended other meetings of this group / other similar events; the facility, location, or the food (if you can say something positive – you don't want to seem critical or whiny); schools you each attended; movies, books, concerts; current events, including sports. Ask open ended questions about their connection with the organization.

Then build a bridge from small talk to career -focused topics, your purpose for being there: the person's employer, specialty, how they chose it and got job, what they do most of the time, events they'd suggest you attend, groups they'd suggest you join, firms/agencies they respect a lot in your chosen field and/or location, etc.

Don't spend too long with one person – for their sake and yours. This isn't an informational interview setting, it's one to mix and meet people for future contact. When you're ready to move on (5 –10 minutes with each person is a usual guide), you can extend your hand for a handshake. Ask for a business card toward the end of the conversation; tell the person you'd like to get in touch to talk further. Some good exit lines:

“I'm sure there are other people you need to talk to. I don't want to monopolize your time. I've enjoyed speaking with you” or “Excuse me, it was nice meeting you” or “Excuse me, there is someone I need to talk to “(be sure you move to another part of the room).

WHEN YOU GET HOME

Record information on the people you met: practice areas, topics discussed, other comments. Also make notes about the event or organization if relevant and calendar any upcoming dates of programs you want to attend or future contacts to make with people you met. Add the person to your mailing list.

Within a week, write personalized notes to people you met, thanking them for anything you learned or advice or referrals they provided and saying you'd like to call to arrange a 15-20 minute meeting to get more suggestions or information. If you mentioned an article or something else they seemed interested in, send them a copy or more information about the item (“here's the website I was describing”, “the movie we talked about is coming to the Roxie next week”, “I came across a review of that restaurant you were asking about”, etc.). If someone had suggested you attend the event, send that person a note or email thanking them.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Crucial first step: figure out what you want in terms of work and life style. What are your priorities? The more you know yourself, the more effectively you'll get help from others.

WHAT INFORMATION DO YOU NEED?

- Explore an area of practice:
 - What practitioners actually do
 - Rewards and frustrations of the work itself: challenge, variety, stress, autonomy, training, growth etc.
 - Lifestyle issues: hours, travel, flexibility, etc.
 - Qualifications and traits of people who fit and are likely to succeed
 - Salary ranges, expectations over time
 - Trends, market forecast
- Find out about the legal market & community in a particular location
- Learn about particular employer(s):
 - What organization(s) / firm(s) do work in your areas of interest, what they are currently doing, and who their major clients are
 - What organization(s) / firm(s) and practitioners are highly regarded
 - What organization(s) / firms(s) you should avoid
- Learn about potential openings and job opportunities

WHAT ELSE ARE YOU SEEKING?

- Help in formulating your job search plans
- Getting feedback on your resumes, cover letters, and search strategy
- Suggestions and advice on additional courses, degrees, work experience you might pursue.
- Suggestions on where to go to find more information
- Referrals to others with whom you can speak and who might help you
- (If you're very lucky, but don't ask overtly) Leads to openings

INTERVIEW WHOM?

- Attorneys or others you met at events
- Attorneys or other people to whom you were referred by anyone else
- Alumni in particular practice areas, types of work setting, geographic areas
- Attorneys you read about or who wrote articles in the legal press, general press, bar publications, on the internet, or in law journals. Attorneys whose cases you've found doing legal research
- Attorneys whose names you've found in directories and bar membership lists such as Martindale Hubbell, the National Lawyers Guild Referral Guide

SETTING UP THE INTERVIEW

- Whenever possible for both of you, you want a face-to-face meeting, but don't turn down a phone interview if that's your best option
- You can initially request the interview by letter, email or phone, but you'll probably make the actual arrangements by phone. Be polite and friendly to any support staff or others you deal with in setting up the interview
- Prepare what you're going to say. Have a brief statement of who you are and what you want. Be clear that you aren't asking for a job, but for information and advice. Tell (in whatever order fits the situation):
 - Your name
 - Who referred you or how you got their name
 - Who you are (*1st year student at UC Davis; recent Davis grad*)
 - Why them (*because they have an international business practice*)
 - What you want (*hoping to get into that field*)

Ask for 15 minutes of their time to meet with you to discuss their area of law, their firm or organization, legal trends; to get advice on marketing yourself...whatever it is. Don't give too long a laundry list of what you want!

PREPARATION

- Research the individual and organization / firm you will visit using library, internet, press, other people
- Set goals for this meeting (or phone conversation, if a face-to-face meeting is impossible). Review your short statement of what you want
- Prepare a brief pitch about your goals and what you have to offer

- Prepare a script outline. Whether you were referred through a contact or wrote a targeted letter, or called “cold”, this is a networking meeting. It must be planned if it’s going to be productive
- List your questions. The sophistication of your questions should be increasing as you do more and more of these interviews. A few ideas are listed below to start you thinking of your own. Don’t recite canned questions from this or other lists.
 1. How the person got their job. What was their career track? What are paths others have followed to similar jobs? What might come next?
 2. Why did you choose it? What do you like about it?
 3. If you were at my level, what would you do differently?
 4. What areas of law are experiencing the most growth?
 5. What are legal trends in this area.
 6. How is your firm structured?
 7. What’s a typical day, week, month like for you?
 8. How soon did you conduct a deposition? Argue a motion? Handle a closing? Appear at an arbitration? Conduct a trial?
 9. What courses are important to get into this practice?
 10. What do you (or your employers) look for in hiring?
 11. What type of person succeeds in this job?
 12. What problems do you see facing this area, firms like yours?
 13. What clinicals should I take to prepare for this work?

THE INTERVIEW

- Arrive a few minutes early and dress professionally. Be courteous to everyone you meet, from receptionists to the most prominent attorneys.
- Bring a copy of your resume, but don’t take it out unless
 - You are asked for it
 - You feel there is enough rapport to ask for advice and suggestions for improvement.
- Throughout, remember that you are the interviewer. You should try to manage the interview so that the person you are interviewing does 80% of the talking. Of course, if they start interviewing you, and you feel a job or job referral is possible, you’ll follow their lead. **Your script is a only a guide; be flexible and tactful.**
- Write a thank you note within a day or two.
- Start with pleasantries. You want to create a very positive first impression, not only of your professionalism, but your likeable qualities.
- Explain why you are there, even though you may have said it in a letter and a phone conversation before. Thank the person for seeing you.

- Before asking questions, give your 1 or 2 minute pitch about yourself. You might say “I wanted to ask you a few questions, but first let me just quickly tell you little about me.”

You want to connect with the person – to get to know each other a bit

The person can help you more if they know something about you

It’s more polite to tell something about yourself before asking a lot of questions about them

- Get the person talking about their work, and their career path.
- Ask the questions you prepared in advance. Take notes.
- You asked for 15 minutes of this busy person’s time. Monitor how much time you’re taking. Pick out questions from your list accordingly. When the 15 minutes are up, say that you promised you’d only take 15 minutes and you don’t want to impose any further. It’s up to them to extend the time, if they wish.
- Ask for referrals if appropriate. Ask if you can use their name. If you get no further contacts, be grateful for the information you got.
- If it seems appropriate, ask if you may set up another time to talk to them in the future.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Assess how you did. Did you present yourself as well as you could? Could you refine your questions?
- Record everything you can about the meeting, using whatever system you’ve set up – card file, binder, computer records.
- Write a thank you note within a day or two.
- Schedule a follow up call or note in your calendar. You should keep the people who have helped you updated on your progress. A contact every few months is appropriate. This follow up can help you and makes the person who met with you feel connected, not used.
- Depending on the relationship you’ve developed with this person, you should keep in touch after you’re established in your new job as well. You may have found a lifetime mentor or friend.