

Making Connections—What the ABA YLD Is Doing to Promote Networking in 2009–2010 and How Your Affiliate Can Benefit, Too

By Christopher Rogers

This year's ABA YLD member service project, *Making Connections: How to Develop Lasting Personal and Professional Relationships*, focuses on skills young lawyers need to develop in their own personal and professional networks. Throughout the year, *Making Connections* materials and content will be available to members at in-person events, teleconference series, and through ABA YLD publications.

This article discusses five axioms of successful networking and uses those concepts to discuss the programming developed for *Making Connections*. After reading this article, hopefully you will find an idea for a program, CLE, or article that will benefit your bar organization.

1. Set Aside Time for Networking

Most attendees at bar association programming list “networking” among the reasons for their participation. Too often, bar programs have little or no time set aside for attendees to mix, mingle, and form the relationships that can become a network.

With *Making Connections*, the ABA YLD is going to change that, and your organization can too. This year, through a series of “interaction opportunities,” the ABA YLD will provide relationship-building skills training along with time set aside specifically for networking.

At the Fall Conference, for example, participants are invited to a “Mocktail Hour.” Mocktail hours can be run many ways, but in one version, participants take on fictitious roles and are asked to “work the room” to identify those with common characteristics. The exercise teaches networking skills and offers lessons on dealing with common situations, including attending an event with co-workers, engaging the wallflower, and dealing with pushy individuals.

Consider whether your organization is right for a “mocktail hour” of its own.

Even if a “mocktail hour” isn't for your group, think about whether your members will benefit from designated networking time during regularly scheduled bar events.

2. Develop Good Networking Skills

To build the right network, young lawyers need the right tools. To that end, the ABA YLD will be giving its members skills training to equip them with the knowledge to plan and develop usable networks.

Consider whether any of the following content—to be produced as part of this year's *Making Connections* program—would be of interest to your members:

- “Networking Versus Business Development: The Importance of Doing Both, and Understanding the Difference”;
- “International Networking Do's and Don'ts”;
- “Networking for Senior Associates/New Partners”;
- “E-Mail/Phone Etiquette for a Digital Age”; and
- “Marketing Yourself Through Pro Bono.”

3. Reach Out to Others

Networking is also about reaching out to those outside our normal circle of contacts. Consistent with that theme, the ABA YLD will present content to its “mailbox” members and members who do not attend ABA YLD conferences through many different channels, including:

- Newsletter articles concerning timely networking topics (e.g., “Networking for Job Seekers,” “Networking for New Bar Admittees”),
- Teleconferences for members who cannot or do not attend in-person programming (e.g., “Networking During the Holidays”), and
- Network planning checklists, to assist members in mapping out their own personal networking strategy

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The ABA YLD will roll out *Making Connections* content to ABA YLD members through these channels throughout the course of this year. Let us know if members of your organization would benefit from having networking content distributed to them through these or other channels beyond the typical in-person meeting.

4. Listen for the Needs of Others

The most-repeated and often least-followed networking rule is simply: Listen. Networking is about giving value to others. Without listening, it is impossible to know how to give someone something they value.

At the ABA YLD, we have tried to determine our members' needs by asking them, informally and through surveys, to identify areas of importance to them. From that process, the *Making Connections* project was born.

Specific *Making Connections* programs have also been created for this year in response to specific needs. For example, ABA YLD members expressed an interest in integration into the greater ABA. In response, the ABA YLD will co-host a speed networking event with other ABA entities at the Midyear Meeting in Florida for precisely that purpose.

Think about how you develop programming to meet your organizations' needs. What kind of networking opportunities would benefit them? Have you surveyed your membership (formally or informally) to learn whether they would like to have opportunities to network with other lawyers/judges/other professional organizations?

5. Share Something of Value

The goal of the *Making Connections: How to Develop Lasting Personal and Professional Relationships* program is to distribute high-quality content to teach relationship-building skills and to give ABA YLD members opportunities to practice those skills.

If any of the content discussed in this article is of interest to your affiliate, we would be happy to discuss making that content available to you as an affiliate leader. Contact chris.rogers@haynesboone.com with your request for more information.

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