

How to Work a Room The Art of Networking for Lawyers

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The legal industry is all about relationships. Who you know is as important as what you know. As a young lawyer, you will network to locate the perfect job, receive the best assignments, find trusted mentors, and increase your exposure to various areas of law. As you advance in your career, you will network to raise your visibility, expand your deal or case portfolio, and develop business relationships.

Networking does not come naturally to many lawyers. It takes time, planning, and practice to master. At your next networking event, try the following five tips and techniques to enhance your relationship-building prowess. And, don't forget your business cards!

1. Prepare strategically. There are many networking opportunities for lawyers through attending conferences, cocktail parties, and industry events. Choosing *where* to network is as important as what you will do when you arrive at the event. Before you RSVP to an event, research available guest lists to determine if the attendees match your "wish list" of new people to meet. If you can obtain guest lists in advance, you should select three to five guests you'd like to meet and conduct some research about them and their organizations. Visit their companies' Web sites to review recent press releases. Google™ their names to see if they have made the news recently and be prepared to mention any positive news stories during conversations with them at the event.

2. Arrive early. If you are unable to obtain a guest list in advance of an event, arrive early at the event and take a few minutes to scan the name badge table. You can identify those people whom you would like to specifically meet. You might consider slipping your business card in an attendee's name badge with a handwritten note on the back saying that you hope to connect at the event. Introduce yourself to the host of the event, and ask the host to introduce you to or point you in the direction of the people you want to meet.

3. Start conversations. As one of the first persons to arrive at an event, you have the advantage of a small crowd. This makes entering and starting conversations easier. Be sure to clip on your name badge as to be easily visible. Look for someone standing alone, and introduce yourself. It's the easiest way to start your small-talk juices flowing. Begin a conversation with a positive comment about the event or the organization, such as, "It looks like they will have quite a turnout; how many people are expected to attend?" or "This is my first industry meeting; have you been a member long?" As you continue your conversation and begin to know the person better, consider asking about one or two of the people whom you hope to meet. If that person knows those attendees, ask if you could be introduced.

Spend no longer than ten to fifteen minutes in conversations with people. Remember that everyone is there to network, and it is important to wisely use your time as to ensure that you meet at least two or three of your selected targets.

4. Gracefully exit conversations. If you find yourself in dead silence with someone whom you don't necessarily want to follow-up with after the event, use that opportunity to exit by saying, "Thank you for talking with me; I know you are here to talk with others so I won't take anymore of your time . . . enjoy the event." If you do want to follow-up with the person, ask to exchange business cards as a way to exit the conversation. At any point you can say, "Before I forget to ask, may I have your business card so we can stay in touch after the event?" This technique works with speed talkers too if you need to interrupt them.

As you leave the event, take a moment to jot a few notes on the back of each business card that you've received, including the name and date of the event. To help jog your memory when you next meet or contact a person, write a word or two about your conversation or things you promised to follow-up on.

5. Follow-up. Establish a tickler system for following-up. Consider placing your follow-up activities into three timeframe categories as appropriate: within one week, over the next few weeks, or within the next few months. Follow-up *within one week* if you promised to send an article that is relevant to a conversation or to answer a specific question. Follow-up *within a few weeks* if you want to schedule a meeting (if you wait longer than a month, a person may not remember you). Follow-up *within a few months* or when relevant if you didn't make an immediate connection with someone (e.g., when you run across information or an opportunity that might benefit someone). No matter when you make contact, be sure to always mention when and where you met to help the person remember the encounter.

Best wishes for successful networking!

NEXT STEPS

- [A Skeptic's Guide to Networking: Some Assembly Required](#) (Downloadable Article). 2009. PC # 17101003304PDFa05. Division for Bar Services.
- [A Life in the Law. 2009](#). PC# 1620413. ABA Publishing.

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