



Networking for new – and not so new – lawyers

Viral networking is not a disease but a successful treatment for expanding your practice.

By PETE MEYERS

You have probably read articles about the tactics of networking for lawyers, such as volunteering for committees, attending events, writing articles and so on. If you are already sold on networking, then you should be doing those things. But if you aren't sold on networking, my simple plan for the beginning networker is this: start with your friends or current network; keep good, tidy records of your contacts; always ask for referrals; and keep networking throughout your career.

Networking with friends

What could be better? Your friends trust you, understand you, and perhaps even love you. That is, only if you have stayed in touch with them. That will not be the case if you suddenly parachute back into their lives after 10 years and immediately start asking for business.

Believe me, I did this early in my short career as a stockbroker. I hit up all of my friends for their grandma's money, and then I would hit up other "friends" I had not seen in years. This is why nowadays I advocate staying in touch with people in order to build credibility. If you are marketing yourself, you want to be the first person your friends think of when someone asks them for services that look a lot like your services.

Call it positioning, branding or capturing "mind share," you just want to stay in touch. In fact, you can network simply by staying in touch with your law



school classmates and students in the classes ahead of and behind you. Once a week, call or e-mail five classmates or friends just to say hello.

Keep good contacts, and good information on good contacts

Because a network is really a communications network, cultivate the kinds of contacts who communicate well in a network environment. That is, network with other networkers. You want the cream of the crop in your contact list, not everybody that gives you a business card. So keep that list tight.

How do you do this? By communicating with your contacts regularly and getting to know them. Learn what they can do for you, and what you can do for them. Your contacts help you by what they know, and you will learn what they know when you communicate with them. It is not necessary to bring up that information in later conversations (such as "Professor, your article on the biome-

chanics of car accidents was fascinating.") However, you can use the information when you need to network ("Professor, given that you've written on the biomechanics of car accidents, do you know of a good biomechanical expert that we can use for the case we have?").

Always ask for a referral

Networks, composed as they are of nodes capable of supporting more than one direct connection, can grow logarithmically. Some call it "viral networking" or "viral marketing," but the point is that the more first-order contacts you have, the more second-order contacts you have access to.

The social networking tool, <http://www.linkedin.com>, is probably the most relevant example. I have 124 first-order connections through LinkedIn, which, according to LinkedIn, gives me access to more than 8,000 second-order connections. LinkedIn will not do your networking for you, but it can give you a sense for the potential of your network.

The best way to observe this logarithmic growth and the fastest way to build your network is by asking for referrals. Moreover, I do not mean just cherry picking through your LinkedIn connections. You should never end any conversation where you are marketing yourself without asking the person, "Who do you know who needs a good plaintiff's attorney?" If that person gives you one name, ask, "Who else do you know?" Keep asking until that person runs out of names to give you.



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I observed this kind of networking growth when I was searching for a job in the first semester of my third year in law school, after the firm I worked at during the previous summer pulled its offer. Instead of relaxing and coasting into my third year, I was now in the same boat with the majority of the 3Ls who had to find jobs and with whom I would be competing.

In my article *Networking Forever* at <http://law.lexisnexis.com/webcenters/newattorney/Career-Guidance-/Career-Guidance/Networking-Forever>, I describe how I networked with the most modest of expectations: to find a decent job at a law firm during my third year. From the time I started searching for work in November, through January of my third year, I met with about 25 attorneys. I talked with just about anyone, including one of the attorneys at the summer firm that withdrew my offer (in fact, this attorney

referred me to six or seven other attorneys.) By the time I met the attorney who eventually gave me a job, I had so many contacts it was difficult to follow up on them all. This is what happens when you do viral networking and aggressively ask for referrals.

Not only does aggressively asking for referrals in every conversation and during every meeting build a list of contacts fast, it gets you what you want – the client, the case, the matter, the deal, the job – faster.

Network forever

People associate “networking” with either a job search or something your boss makes you, an introvert, do to drum up business. Networking is not about trotting out your social skills only when you have a major task. It is a way of life, a style of living. We live in an interconnected world where someone has a need

and someone else fulfills it. Ideally, you will have a need that I can fulfill. Social networking is rooted in this kind of supply and demand.

Now that I have explained to you the “why” of networking, you will be able to read those articles about the “what” of networking with a more practiced eye. By using these networking tips, you can add another tool in your arsenal to achieve success in your practice and your profession.



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