



# HOW TO NETWORK: EVEN IF YOU'RE INTROVERTED

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## WHY NETWORK?

The term “networking” is often misunderstood. For many it means going to parties, conferences or meetings and shaking hands with as many strangers as possible. But “networking” actually describes a natural activity that everyone engages in on some level. Every law student knows how to network, although you may not realize it. We network when we call up a friend of a friend who lives in San Francisco to let them know we are looking for a place to live, or need a recommendation for a restaurant for visiting friends. Yet somehow, when it comes to developing connections to future employment opportunities, many people resist and conclude that they are not good “networkers.”

However, networking is probably the single most effective way to get a job. A large number of available jobs are not advertised, but rather are filled by word of mouth. Even those that are advertised are often filled with a candidate who somehow made a personal connection with the hiring employer. In today’s legal market networking is an essential part of a job search.

The good news is that networking is a SKILL that can be learned. Networking has to become an integral part of your legal career in order for you to be successful. For instance, if you enter into private practice and your goal is to become partner, then you will need to build a “Book of Business,” meaning you need to bring clients to the firm. How do you get clients? By networking of course!

One way to overcome any roadblocks you may have to networking is to realize we all network and that professional networking is just an extension of the networking you do with your family and friends.

### **The Benefits of Networking**

Networking can be a way to:

- ◆ make new friends
- ◆ make important contacts
- ◆ learn about practice areas and career paths
- ◆ find a mentor
- ◆ promote yourself and your firm/employer
- ◆ get new clients
- ◆ establish or strengthen relations
- ◆ increase your self-confidence

Once you get the basic networking skills down, networking can be fun!

## HOW DO I START NETWORKING?

### 1. START WITH PEOPLE YOU KNOW.

- Make a list of family, friends, acquaintances, professors, other students, attorneys and other professionals that you know.
- Tell those folks on your list that you are now in law school and are excited about searching for a job.
- Let them know that if they have any leads, or know anyone who may be looking for a law clerk, to please let you know.

However, to really get the full benefit of networking, you need to put some effort into it. Do some research. Find out who is doing what you want to do. You will need to deliver a clear, consistent message to your network regarding the type of work you are looking for and what you are interested in. Make a concerted effort to contact people, through correspondence, informational interviews, or job fairs. The Office of Career Planning offers programs to help you network and connect with career opportunities. Please feel free to come to us for advice, information, and encouragement.

### 2. IDENTIFY EVENTS TO ATTEND.

The law school and the Office of Career Planning offer excellent opportunities for networking on campus throughout the year. Additionally, OCP will announce off-campus opportunities via flyers, email and [www.USFLawLink.com](http://www.USFLawLink.com).

#### NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

While not an exhaustive list, the following are excellent places and ways to network:

- Attend Job Fairs and Recruitment Programs
- At Your Part-Time Job
- Volunteer Positions
- Through your Civil, Criminal, or Judicial Externship
- Join Student Organizations, Local Bar Associations, Community Organizations
- Go on Informational Interviews (See *Informational Interviewing* Handout)

## STEP BY STEP NETWORKING TIPS

Once you decide upon an event, follow these step-by-step tips to turn you into the networker you never thought you could be:

### 1. PREPARE FOR THE EVENT.

- **Have a positive attitude.** If you are feeling low energy or not up to the event, this

negative energy will show through. Do what you need to perk yourself up and put yourself in the right frame of mind.

- **Have topics of conversation ready.** Be up on current events.
  - Read the newspaper or e-news and scan the current headlines of the day.
  - Read the sports section and be up on local teams.
- **Set goals for yourself.** Don't go just to talk – be purposeful as to the reason why you are going. Set goals such as connecting with 3 to 5 people, learning about the latest legal trend, or to speak with certain people that you know will be at the event.

## 2. RSVP TO THE EVENT AND GO.

- **Pay in Advance.** If the event costs money, pay in advance and you'll be less likely to skip the event.
- **Employ the Buddy System.** Getting there is the hardest part for some.
  - Have a friend go with you and make a pact beforehand that neither of you will back out and if one does, then that person owes the other lunch, dinner or some other appropriate prize.
  - Agree that you will talk to other people and will separate during the event.
- **Dress Professionally.** Err on the side of being conservative. If attorneys will be there directly from work, then dress like an attorney. You can never go wrong by coming in a suit or other appropriate business attire.

## 3. EVENT STRATEGIES.

Once you are at the event, employing the following strategies will help the event go smoother for you and some of these techniques will assist you in overcoming your shyness.

- **Name Tag.** Wear it on your RIGHT side of your chest, as it will be easier to read when a person shakes your hand.
  - Write your FIRST name in ALL CAPITAL letters so that is more visible and your last name can be smaller.
- **Pretend You are an Event Host.** This will help you overcome your fears or shyness because if you are busy making others feel welcome, you will forget about yourself.
  - As "Host" - Be helpful. Introduce people, starting conversations, showing attendees where the drinks or appetizers are located.
- **Approach and Be Approachable.**
  - Smile and be open. Make eye contact. Talk to those that look more nervous than you or those who are standing alone.
  - Employ the "Bar Strategy." Typically, everyone heads to the bar first. Join the pack and engage in small talk with others around you. For openers, comment on how long the drink line is.
- **Circulate and "Work the Room."** The bar, the appetizer table, the coat check, the entrance, are all key gathering places for crowds and represent easy opportunities to strike up a conversation.
- **Remember Names.** Repeat the person's name when introduced. Read the name tag and say the name 3 times in your head and at least twice during your conversation to help you remember.

- **Obtain Business Cards.** A great way to remember names is to obtain a person's business card. However, either at the event or shortly thereafter, make a note on the back of the business card with the name and date of the event and a short note regarding your conversation or some other tidbit to help you remember that person.

#### 4. SUREFIRE ICEBREAKERS.

- **Engage in Small Talk.** For great small talk topics, see "The Art of Small Talk" box below. Believe it or not, the weather is always a good fallback topic, as well as talking about the event itself.
- **The Importance of Small Talk.** Why engage in small talk? Because you need to find common ground. You and the other person need to determine whether there is enough of a connection between the two of you to continue the conversation on a deeper level. You must engage in small talk first, and establish rapport, before you can bring up a business agenda.

### THE ART OF SMALL TALK

#### *Great Small Talk Topics:*

- The event you are attending, the speaker, the sponsoring organization
  - What do you think of this event? Are you a member of this bar association?
- Schools attended – law school, undergraduate, high school
- Movies, television shows, plays, books, concerts, other major events
  - What's the last great movie you saw? Do you watch any of the reality shows?
- Current newsworthy events – especially sports
  - What do you think of those Giants? A's? NBA playoffs?
- Where the other person is from, especially if not from the Bay Area
- Restaurants, wine, gourmet foods
  - Have you heard of the new restaurant that Michael Mina opened?
- Travel – countries you've both visited or would like to visit
- Must see sight-seeing places (especially good if the person is new to town)
- Vacations or upcoming holiday plans
- Exercise, hobbies, pets, children, special courses taken
- The other person's company, firm, practice area

#### *Topics to Avoid:*

- Your health, their health, the health of others you know
- Your economic or financial troubles or mishaps
- Gossip, off-color jokes, flirting
- Controversial subjects – abortion, sex, politics for some, religion
- Any topic where you disparage other people or make condescending comments
- Anything negative!

**5. FROM SMALL TALK TO BIG TALK - BRINGING UP YOUR “AGENDA.”** If you meet someone at the event who you would believe would be a great contact, potential client, mentor, or possible employer, then you will need to bring up your business agenda gracefully. Do NOT ask for leads and referrals right away. Here’s how to move from small talk to big talk:

- **Give Your Pitch.** Tell the person who you are, what you do, and your professional goal. Examples of some pitches depending on your goal:
  - Expand Network. I am a first year student at USF School of Law and I’m really excited about exploring the different career possibilities open to me. I’m hoping to meet attorneys in real estate law, tax and wills and trusts.
  - A Job/Informational Interview. I am a recent graduate of USF School of Law and I’m very interested in employment law. I’m hoping to obtain an associate position in a firm with that specialty and I’d love to talk to some employment attorneys to get tips on how to enter this field.
  - Obtain Clients. I’m a senior associate at Bigsly, Bixby and Binky and I specialize in Employment litigation, representing management. I’m at a stage in my career where I’m looking to build my client base.
  - ***Then most importantly,*** ask the other person, “What is it you do?” Remember that attorneys love to talk about themselves, so this is the easy part.
  
- **Be Inquisitive about the Other Person’s Line of Work.** Find out what the other person does and what the main issue concerning their line of work is. ***THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT STEP:*** This bridges the gap from personal talk to business talk.
  - Expand Network. Ask “What is it that made you choose your practice area/firm.” Then move the conversation to whether they know attorneys in your field of interest.
  - A Job/Informational Interview. Do not ask for a job. Instead, ask if you can continue the conversation to learn more about how to enter this field. “I would love to continue this conversation to learn more about employment law. Could I have your business card?”
  - Obtain Clients. Ask the person “What is the biggest challenge facing your firm / practice area at this time? Then relate to that person’s problem. After the person identifies her biggest challenge, do your best to relate to and understand the problem. If you have faced a similar problem, tell her so. If not, ask additional questions to show you want to understand the problem.

**6. EXTRICATING GRACEFULLY FROM CONVERSATIONS.** There is no rule that says you have to talk to the same person the entire time. Sometimes the quick conversations are the most fruitful. After the pleasantries below, smile and leave.

- **Exercise Your Manners.** Exit by saying:
  - “Excuse me, it was a pleasure meeting you.”
  - “Excuse me, I enjoyed talking to you. Could I have your business card as I’d love to follow-up with you.”

7. **AFTER THE EVENT.** Follow-up after an event is one of the most important but often forgotten steps. After each networking event, be sure to reconnect with your new contacts while the event is still fresh in their minds. When contacting the person by email or phone, reference the event where you met, and if you spoke about a particular topic of interest, mention that also in order to trigger that person's memory.
- **Business Cards.** As stated above, write event date and details such as practice area, common interests, and topics discussed.
  - **Follow-up on Promises Made.** If you told the person you would call or email, do so. If you said you would send them an article, mail it. Being as good as your word will help build your reputation in the legal community. Start now.
  - **Conduct Informational Interviews.** If you meet someone who works in a practice area or for an employer you are interested in, contact that person to see if she will meet with you for 15-30 minutes to answer questions you have regarding her work and career path. For more detailed information on Informational Interviewing, see the handout, *Informational Interviewing: The Job Search Secret Weapon* which can be found in your Handbook or in OCP.
  - **Send Thank You Notes.** If the person gave you particularly helpful advice or a lead, then send a personalized note by mail or email.
  - **Add the Person to Your Contact List.** Use LinkedIn.com to manage your professional networks. Or if you have another system in place for your contacts, use that but make sure you manage and maintain your network in a way that works for you. You never know who may be able to help you or who you may be able to help in the future.
  - **Keep in Touch.** Find ways to keep in touch – holiday cards, emails about your career path such as a new job, happy birthday greetings, sharing recipes or articles - these are all good ways to maintain your network.

## NETWORKING CHECKLIST

### Before the Event:

- RSVP and set goals for yourself
- Do your research on attendees (if known)
- Bring your business cards
- Dress professionally
- Prepare topics of conversation
- Have your "Elevator Pitch" ready

### During the Event:

- Engage in small talk
- Approach others and be approachable
- Obtain business cards

### After the Event:

- Write notes on business cards to help you remember
- Follow-up with your new contacts
- Send thank you notes or emails
- Keep in touch