

Networking Tips and Strategies

Why is networking important?

- The hidden job market accounts for 60% to 80% of jobs.
 - Many legal employers cannot afford to advertise and prefer to hire by word of mouth, i.e., either people they know or people who are referred to them.
 - Most law students find jobs either through networking or through self-initiated contact with employers (targeted mailing).
- Beyond finding your first legal job, building and maintaining a strong network will help you learn about promising opportunities later in your career.
- In the future, networking can help you generate business (either directly or through attorney referrals) and will also introduce you to attorneys who may be able to assist you with various legal practice issues (especially true for solo practitioners).

What is networking?

- Networking is a process for obtaining information on strategies for achieving your career goals, advice, and referrals *without asking for a job*. It's about getting to know people and sharing information.
- Networking is NOT: asking for a job, bragging, gossiping, using people, or pretending you are something you are not.
- Networking goals:
 - To meet someone who will either refer you to a potential employer or ultimately hire you for a position; and/or
 - To build strategic relationships that will help you build your career in the future or generate business.

Do you harbor any aversions to networking?

Career Planning Offices at law schools across the nation hear the same common excuses from students every year ...

- ***I don't want to look stupid.***
 - Nobody expects law students to know a lot about the practice of law. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. In fact, it shows curiosity, motivation, and enthusiasm.
- ***I'm afraid of rejection.***
 - Rejection is just part of the process that you have to deal with. Go into it expecting some rejection. Be resilient and patient; take the negative responses in stride and move on.
- ***Networking seems so fake to me, like I'm using people to get ahead.***
 - What is so fake about asking for and sharing information? Most experienced attorneys are happy to help out newcomers to the law because they have been in your shoes before.
 - Think you have nothing to offer or share with them? Think again; people will be interested to hear insights about you and your school or other interesting experiences you have had.

- ***I'm busy with school and don't have time to network.***
 - Just devote a little bit of time to networking – things that are important in life are worth making time for. It's like finding time to exercise, and it *will* pay off.
 - On a related note, include networking events as part of your budget. We recommend that you set aside \$100 - \$150 a year to cover bar association fees and event cover charges.
- ***I'm shy and am uncomfortable talking to strangers.***
 - The best networkers do not necessarily have outgoing personalities.
 - The best networkers are people who are good listeners and who enjoy connecting with others.

Identify your network

- Personal Contacts—family, friends, coworkers (including former), church/synagogue/mosque, doctor, hairdresser, people at the health club. Let everyone know that you are in law school!
- Professors – faculty and adjunct professors can help you learn more about an area of interest and can help introduce you to practitioners.
- Career Panel Speakers – stick around after the presentation to speak with them.
- Bar Associations – section meetings/luncheons, social and volunteer events, etc.
- Mentors and Alumni.
- Internship and Externships.
- Online – LinkedIn and Facebook (be mindful of your online image).

Networking in Social Settings

- ***Before the Event:***
 - Create small goals for yourself, e.g., to meet three new people, to learn about a specific practice area, or to investigate the market in a certain city.
 - Dress appropriately.
 - If nervous, find a friend to attend with you.
 - Keep current on news and events.
 - Be prepared to answer questions about the law school.
 - Bring your student business cards.
 - Prepare your introduction: —Hi, I'm Jenny Smith. I'm a second year student at Valparaiso University Law School.
- ***During the Event:***
 - Survey the room and grab something to drink/eat before navigating the room. Carry your beverage in your left hand so it's easier to shake hands with people.
 - Breaking into a conversation:
 - Avoid approaching two people who look as though they are having an intense conversation
 - Approach groups of 3-4 who look like they are having fun. Stand nearby, smile, and wait for the appropriate time to join the conversation.
 - When you are being approached, be open to others. When you see someone on the periphery step back and include them. See if others can help make introductions for you at the event.

- Conversation starters:
 - Smile.
 - Introduce yourself.
 - Extend your hand.
 - Allow the other person to introduce himself/herself and **listen** to the name.
 - Open with something about the organization, the venue, the food, etc. —This is my first time at a Trial Law Section meeting, how about you?
 - Avoid negative comments or complaints.
- Carrying on the conversation: ask appropriate questions, such as, —Have you been active in the organization? or —What have you heard about the speakers?
- Make a graceful exit. There is always a point where the conversation loses steam, so have your exit line prepared. Wait until YOU have finished making a comment, then follow by extending your hand and saying something similar to:
 - It was so nice meeting you, Bob. I'd love to continue our conversation another time. Do you have any business cards on you? (offer your card)
 - Thanks for all of your advice. It was really great speaking with you, and I'd love to follow up. Exchange cards.
 - Nice chatting with you, Lisa. I'm going to get something to eat, but I'd love to stay in touch. Exchange cards.
- **After the Event:**
 - Write useful information on the back of the business cards collected, i.e., event, date, and something about your conversation to trigger your memory.

Informational Interviewing

- An informational interview is an informal meeting arranged in advance for the purpose of seeking advice from an experienced professional about a specific career path.
- You can generate informational interviews through networking, but informational interviewing can also create more networking leads.
- Make initial contact via U.S. Mail (recommended) or via e-mail, not by phone.
- Do not confuse a letter requesting an informational meeting with a cover letter.
- Include the following in the letter:
 - Who you are
 - How you got their name (perhaps you met them at an event, someone referred you to them, you researched them online, or you saw a news article about them)
 - The purpose of the letter – remember, the purpose is to seek information, not to land a job
- Meeting Time/Place – always suggest their office first, but be flexible. Try not to take up more than 30 minutes of their time unless they allow otherwise. It's fine if they would rather meet for coffee or lunch, but be prepared to pay and don't expect them to be generous just because you are a student.
- Before the meeting, prepare questions in advance:
 - What motivated you to become a family law attorney?

- How did you obtain your first job? Can you describe your career path to me?
- What do you enjoy about this area of the law?
- Can you give me an example of an interesting case you handled?
- What advice would you have for someone trying to break into this area of the law?
- Resume – bring your resume with you to present at the end of the conversation. It would be appropriate to ask them to review it and to see whether they have any suggestions.
- It is appropriate to ask for leads at some point during the conversation: —Is there anyone else who you would suggest I talk to about my interest in tax law?

Get Organized, Follow-Up, and Stay Connected

- Maintain a networking notebook/log.
- After meeting someone at an event, consider a friendly e-mail to let them know how much you enjoyed meeting them.
- Always send a thank you note after an informational interview or to anyone who refers you to a potential job lead.
- Stay connected by apprising people of your status from time to time.
- Develop strong relationships with your classmates during school and stay in touch after graduation. Contact Vanessa Verner, the Associate Director of Alumni Relations, about connecting with an alumni mentor.
- Become a member of the Official Valparaiso Law Alumni Group on LinkedIn.