

## **Networking: What Is It? And Do I Really Have to Do It?**

***Q. I am one of the many attorneys looking for employment in these challenging times. Everything I read indicates that networking is key. I have already contacted every attorney I know, and I still don't have a job. I am getting discouraged. Do you have any suggestions?***

A. Yes! First of all, you are correct in recognizing that these are challenging times for attorneys looking for employment. And, you are also correct in recognizing that networking is essential—especially in this market.

Even employers who have a need are reluctant to advertise for fear of being inundated with resumes and besieged with calls.

Networking is the only way to access the “hidden job market” (unadvertised positions). Networking is essential—but also misunderstood. It is not just a matter of talking to every attorney you know. Networking is the process of building new, mutually beneficial relationships -- in the search for information, advice and referrals.

The old adage, “It’s who you know,” is only the beginning. It is the people who know the people you know, who are most important in your career search. A few years ago, a client shared with me that networking just wasn’t working for him. Then I discovered he was simply meeting with the same law school classmate every Friday for lunch. This is not networking! By talking only to the people you know, you don’t get any new information or perspective.

Networking is talking to the people you already know to find the people you don’t know -- who have new insights and perspectives. And they don’t have to be attorneys to help you find employment in law. One client, who was new to Seattle, shared with her dermatologist that she was seeking an opportunity in estate planning. He gave her the names of partners in several firms, including one who was looking for an associate in estate planning and hired her.

When you do meet someone for the first time, it is important that you explain you are in transition but you are *not* asking them to give you a job. Instead, you are hoping that they can provide you with information and advice — and, most importantly, names of other people for you to meet.

The best place to start networking is by talking to your acquaintances who know everyone. They will provide you not only with information but also with valuable referrals. When I was making my own transition out of the practice of law, I met with a colleague who was well connected. It took weeks before I could get on her calendar (well-connected people are generally also very busy!). When we finally met, she gave me the names of several people to call, including a former banker. At first I was puzzled. Why a banker? I talked to her anyway and

learned that she was working with displaced bankers after the spate of bank mergers a number of years ago. Epiphany! I could help attorneys in transition just as she was helping bankers! Talking to a hundred lawyers would not have given me the perspective and inspiration this one banker was able to provide. Of course, this was not the end of the story. After meeting with the banker, I met with dozens of other individuals, many of whom provided valuable insight and perspective. From these conversations, I was able to assemble the puzzle pieces that became my new career!

It is important to have realistic expectations. Not every networking meeting will yield valuable insights. In fact, many meetings may be disappointing. Dead ends. If you meet with five people, it is likely that one will actually be discouraging. Two or three will be pleasant but unable to help in any meaningful way. And one, if you are lucky, will provide valuable information. Most of us are not comfortable with these odds and are inclined to give up after a few disappointing encounters. Don't!

From the experience of my clients, it is when they are making about five calls a day and meeting with eight to ten new people a week that they are getting close to finding a new, exciting opportunity!

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