

The Law of the Lawyer

David Glynn

The Importance Of Networking For Attorneys In Transition

When searching for employment or starting one's own law firm, in the early steps it's more about who you know than what you do. Background and experience are essential to gainful employment and success, but getting in the door to relate your credentials is the first step. In the case of seeking employment, there are a variety of ways to do this: Responding to job ads, resume submission to job boards and prospective employers, signing up with employment agencies, and the most important routine: Networking.

Virtual vs. Actual Networking

These days you can “virtually” network as well as “physically” network. Virtual networking involves the use of sites like LinkedIn, Chicago Lawyer Network, Facebook, Legally Minded, MySpace, and Martindale Connect. Actual networking involves face-to-face meet-and-greets with colleagues and potential colleagues. I would suggest that virtual networking is a



means to the physical networking. Even though I'm connected virtually to others, it's the actual face-to-face networking that's helped lead to my success in both pursuit of career and career growth. I have career-counseled several professionals over the years and face-to-face networking has led to gainful employment more than any other act.

Professional Networking Sites To Consider

Of the virtual networking sites, let's focus on two: LinkedIn and the Chicago Lawyer Network. LinkedIn is a good site because it is business-oriented, unlike Facebook and MySpace, which tend to lean toward the personal pages. LinkedIn is a well-established site, so much so, that our country's president has a legitimate page on the site. There are several professional groups within LinkedIn that you can join. Although it is not attorney-focused, it is business-focused and a good way to broadcast your credentials (within reason — please consult with your ARDC rules and ethical cannons regarding this).

The Chicago Lawyer Network is a new site developed by the Chicago Lawyer/Law Bulletin that

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focuses on local lawyers. There are several members that I would consider heavy hitters in the profession (many 40 Under 40 alumni) and there are several new attorneys as well. The membership is not huge at this point, but that could be to your advantage. In conjunction with the site, several “actual” networking events are hosted. The last two events featured speed networking at River North restaurants where attendees were assigned to sit across from each other and exchange elevator speeches and contact information. There was also informal networking in a cocktail setting before and after the event. The feedback from the events was positive and many participants returned for a subsequent event.

The Chicago Lawyer Network is a growing site that is focused on practitioners that range from large firm to small firm, corporate, non-profit and government. The wide variety of member backgrounds enables solid contacts throughout the Chicago area.

Martindale Connect is a new site that is worldwide and the American Bar Association has a site called Legally Minded, both sites are relatively new and each site has some unique features. If time permits, one should join all of the sites mentioned above.

How To Leverage Virtual Networks

The big question is how do you use these sites? In the Chicago Lawyer Network, you can reach out to the members and become “friends” or connected contacts. You can join practice groups and alumni groups. You can blog and you can start discussion topics. This can lead to more contacts. The Chicago Lawyer Network is beneficial because it ties into actual events. As a follow-up to the events you can connect on the Network with those whom you’ve met.

LinkedIn is a good site due to its longevity in the marketplace. I use LinkedIn to locate past colleagues, alumni that I’ve lost contact with, and peo-

ple I would like to get to know better. I found that the most useful tool from LinkedIn is that when I locate a colleague I can look at their connections. When I do this I find several people that I’ve had some type of connection with over the years. I then ask them to join my connections. This leads to discussions, sometimes lunch or coffee and recognition that we have a relationship of some kind.

Back To Basics

After you have connected with several colleagues or contacts using the sites mentioned above or your MS Outlook contacts, it’s time for face-to-face meetings. But for these meetings, you must be organized and know what you want to say and do. As far as the presentation part, you should prepare an elevator speech something that lasts no more than three minutes that describes:

- What you’d like to do (get to the point right away);
- How your background applies to your goal;
- What makes you unique (focus on the positive).

Because you can’t have the egg without the chicken, you must first decide what your career goal is. Deciding what your career goal can be an extremely tough question. I recommend hiding in a dark room by yourself, fasting for several days and meditating (joking). Or if you’re like me, you get your best ideas by walking down a busy street during the lunch hour. Do what works for you. If YOU don’t know what you’re going to do, no one will be able to help you. So never mind the networking, figure out your plan first. You ultimately want a JOB so don’t over-analyze — just figure out what kind of job you’d like to have.

Once you have completed the three items discussed above, practice on a colleague and receive a critique. The more well-oiled your presentation, the more confident you’ll feel in presenting it. You must be sincere above all else.

The Face-To-Face Networking Meeting

Your goal in the networking meeting is to have the individual you are meeting with take a genuine interest in your career search. If this person takes a genuine interest, he or she will recommend you to other colleagues. The other goal is to leave this meeting with a few more trusted contacts with whom you'll set up similar meetings. If you express yourself correctly, they will recommend contacts that fit with your pursuit.

In the face-to-face meetings, don't take up a lot of the person's time. Overall, no one wants to waste time. Keep things focused and on point. Be pleasant and gracious, ask for some help, write down the new contacts or at least secure a promise that you'll receive them in a follow up email. Later that day, send them a handwritten thank you note.

With each visit you will gain more contacts and therefore expand your network. By the time you spend a couple of weeks conducting these face-to-face meetings you should have a fairly big group out there helping you to find a job or assist you with a start-up firm. Just picture the VerizonWireless™ commercials with the large network behind you. Fortunately, everyone knows these are tough times, so people should be willing to help you out if they are able.

Networking Opportunities Are Everywhere

Networking opportunities are abundant — so getting out there is not difficult. There are free and paid events regularly hosted by bar associations, alumni groups, courts, mediation groups, and others. Joining subcommittees of bar groups is a great way to meet colleagues in the same practice areas. Any meeting, presentation, or CLE seminar is an opportunity to network.

Business Card And Web Site

You *must* have a business card. As a lawyer, you can simply have your name, counselor at law as your title, and your contact info — email is very important. You can get these made very cheaply. It should also bear your Linked-In page if you have one or a personal Web address. There are several outfits that host Web pages for sole practitioners. This is where you can post your resume and have your experience listed for reference.

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