



AND THE ART OF LEGAL NETWORKING

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INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON
*Relationship Building
within the International
Lawyers Network*

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Lawyers: Everything You Know About Networking is Wrong

BY LINDSAY GRIFFITHS ON MARCH 14, 2017



“Don’t talk to people you know.”

“Follow up immediately.”

“Meet as many new people as possible.”

“— — — — —”

“Jump into social media.”

Is any of this sounding familiar to you?

As you head off to yet another networking event or conference, is someone admonishing you not to spend time with the people you know, but to get “five new business cards” by the end of the evening? Are you dreading yet another long session of small talk about the weather, or worse, politics, with a crowd of people you’ve never met?

Never fear, I’m here to tell you that everything you know about networking may be wrong.

Yep, I said it. **It’s wrong.**

How can that be? Two important reasons.

Networking starts with a goal

First: *networking starts with a goal.* Like anything you do when it comes to business development, relationship development or any of the activities that, as [Kelly Hoey says in her book](#) “connect and strengthen our relationships with other people,” you need to understand what it is that you want to achieve. Do you want to:

- Meet new people and potentially develop new business relationships?
- Deepen existing relationships?
- Extend your professional reputation?
- Meet influencers and amplifiers to put you in front of the right audiences?
- Broaden your professional knowledge about a subject?

Depending on what your goal is for a particular situation (and it can be any of the above, a combination, or a completely different goal), you may take on a different strategy for achieving it. If, say, your goal is to deepen your existing relationships with people you already know, then you’re going to reach out to them before an event or conference and ensure that you set up a time and place to connect. You’re going to spend the bulk of your networking time engaged with them. And your follow up is going to be dedicated to finding additional opportunities to reconnect in the near future.

If, however, you’re looking to develop business, or you’re in a position of leadership, and you want to give back, then you might be more focused on meeting new people, reaching out to those who are attending the event for the first time, and connecting them with others that you’ve met previously. Your strategy and tactics in networking are entirely dependent on what YOUR goals are, and not on some set of rules that someone else lays out for you.

Networking is all around

Second: much like they say in one of my all time favorite movies, *Love Actually*, *networking is “all around.”* It is something that you’re doing all the time, with shifting purposes, strategies, and tactics, based on what your current target is at the time.

When I’m going out with friends, my goal is to deepen my existing relationships and enjoy myself. Once in a while, it may also be to meet new people. At a conference that I’m hosting, it’s entirely to facilitate connections among my lawyers, with a secondary goal of extending my professional reputation, as well as deepening existing relationships with my members. When I attend a legal marketing conference, I’m going to broaden my professional knowledge and deepen existing relationships with industry friends I only see once a year. When I connect to a new contact online and arrange a call with them, I may be looking to develop new business relationships, or meet influencers or amplifiers, depending on the context.

Each situation is a shifting, changing, morphing sphere, which I hold onto lightly, and is comprised of the people in my networks – sometimes, these networks overlap and sometimes they are entirely separate. But for each one, I identify my goals, and from there, I determine the strategy and tactics I will use to achieve those goals.

Networking is about personality

The third piece that comes into this, which also can’t be ignored, is that of personality type. We’ve already talked rather a lot about networking here on Zen (it’s in the title after all), and many of you will already know that I’m an introvert. There are three general personality types (not taking into account Briggs Myers), and they are introverts, extroverts, and ambiverts. Most people fall into the ambivert category, which is defined as:

“

a person whose personality has a balance of extrovert and introvert features.”

I still fully identify as an introvert, which doesn’t mean that I’m shy so much as I get my energy internally, and need to recharge by myself after spending a lot of time with people. It also means that I find networking to be particularly challenging. Many lawyers are also introverts. Networking successfully is possible for all personality types, of course, but you have to be able to take into account what works best for you in order to set yourself up for success. For example, if left alone in an exhibit hall of a conference if I’m not there to meet someone, I’m generally going to just leave and head back to my room, or find a quiet corner where I can use my mobile device as a crutch. It’s much easier for me to meet new people if I have a friend or colleague with me that I can use to help me break the ice in meeting someone new – either we can approach someone new together, or he or she can introduce me to someone they know that I don’t, or vice versa.

The short version?

There's no “right” way to network.

There are tactics and strategies that are available to you that will help to make you more successful in achieving the goals that you have for a particular networking event. But it's up to you to decide which ones are right for you based on your goals, the situation, and your personality type.