

NETWORKING NEVER ENDS

Congratulations, you have accepted that job offer. You are now a practicing attorney. This in itself is a great accomplishment. You may have endured countless interviews, networking at school or state bar functions, or just mass mailing your resume and cover letter. However you did it, you did. Now the real work begins.

Many new associates decide it is time to relax and just focus on work now that they have that job. WRONG! Now is the time to kick that networking gene into high gear. You now have two priorities in your networking world, networking to the community as a whole and networking with other lawyers.

The first part of this plan helps you keep the job you worked so hard to get. The economy (I know all you have heard is how bad the economy is) has redefined the legal practice. Today it is not acceptable for a first or second year associate to sit back and just work on whatever is given to them. Every lawyer has to help bring the firm business. You may not be the one who helps each client you bring in but the firm will definitely take notice.

Imagine there are two new associates for the medium sized criminal defense/family law firm of Simpson & Griffin. Associate 1 does everything he is asked to do and does it well. But over the course of the first year he brings in zero new clients to the firm. Associate 2 also does all the work she is asked to do but as well she brings in 6 new clients through her outside networking. Each of these clients had an average legal bill of \$5,000. Associate 2 has paid for somewhere between 1/3 and 1/2 of her salary. Small firms in tight times will recognize this and reward it as well.

You may be asking yourself how do I, the brand new associate, bring in new clients. Being a lawyer requires being at least in a small part a sales person. There are people you know, make sure they know what you are doing and where you are doing it. It is great for a new associate to send out an announcement of their new job. Most newspapers in the business section will publish this for free if you are on a limited budget, but think strongly about going to a stationary store and having an announcement professionally printed. You can send these to all of your law school classmates, undergraduate classmates, former coworkers, members of any civic group you are affiliated with and any other people who would ever consider sending a holiday card to.

After this first step then you have to really begin the hard work. Are you a member of any networking group? Do you belong to a Chamber of Commerce? How about volunteering for a non-profit? Any and all of these can provide you that one lead that can make you invaluable to your firm as a new associate. The contacts that you make while participating in these organizations may never directly be a client of yours, but who knows how many of their friends may become clients. Think to yourself how many times you have been asked do you know a good/trustworthy dentist, auto mechanic, tax guy, etc. You want to be the person people say when asked "do you know a good lawyer?" The only way you can do that is by making sure everyone knows you are a lawyer, and a good one at that.

The second aspect to networking is within the profession. This networking has a dual purpose: (1) to help build referrals for your current position; and (2) to market yourself for any possible job opportunities that may become available.

Part one of networking with lawyers is the same as networking outside the legal profession, build your business. If you are a family law attorney, talk with a tax attorney or an estate planning attorney. Send them business. This is very important. You do NOT want to be the one always asking people to send you clients but rather the lawyer that sends clients to others. Imagine if over the course of six months you send 4 or 5 clients to an estate planning attorney, when this attorney is asked of a family law attorney he is going to definitely return the favor.

The second part of this networking is to meet and get to know lawyers when you are NOT looking for a job. These are the times that you can be completely relaxed and just communicate with these lawyers. You do not have to sell yourself and you do not have the pressure of trying to say the perfect line that will get you the job. As a result you will build relationships with attorneys and in turn you will become a true member of the legal community.

Most people say they have found their dream jobs when they weren't even looking. Some say that you cannot wait for opportunities to fall into your lap. This is a combination of those two theories. You are working to meet lawyers and getting to know them, help them and understand their needs. They, in turn, are seeing you at your best and when there is an opportunity they are going to think of you.

Use these tools and grow your business and your worth. There is nothing more valuable than a lawyer that has a base of business that travels with them from firm to firm. Be the young aggressive, assertive lawyer that the legal community knows and is talking about. Best of luck.

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