
CREATING CONNECTIONS: NETWORKING and INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Office of Career and Professional Development
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Creating and cultivating professional relationships is a crucial aspect of your career development. It's a way to make new friends and valuable contacts, learn about different practices and career paths, promote yourself and your employer, acquire new clients, increase your self-confidence, and have some fun. And, it gets easier the more you practice!

WHY NETWORK?

- Most post law school jobs are not advertised, so networking puts you in touch with the people “in the know” about career opportunities.
- Cultivating relationships helps you meet people at your target employer, which helps you stand apart from other candidates.
- Mass mailings rarely pay off – most jobs result from personal contacts.

Time-tested Networking Strategies

1. START WITH THOSE YOU KNOW

- *Tell everyone you know that you are looking for a legal position* and that you would like to meet and speak with legal professionals. (Tell your family, friends, professors, doctor, dentist, teaching assistants, college classmates, and former employers.)
- *Get an alumni mentor!* [Make an appointment](#) to meet with the Alumni Mentor Program Director. Use your mentor(s) as a springboard to more contacts so you can build a network.
- *Use LinkedIn!* Update your LinkedIn profile, and use LinkedIn to see who among your contacts is connected to employers that interest you. Then ask for an introduction.

2. VOLUNTEER, VOLUNTEER, AND VOLUNTEER SOME MORE

- Volunteering is a great way to show initiative, enthusiasm and dedication. It's also a way to make contacts in the legal community, if networking is daunting.
- Help organize a career panel for a student organization. Recruiting local attorneys as panelists will allow you to establish valuable connections.
- Write articles: Contact professors or other attorneys and ask for suggestions for article topics in areas of law that interest you. Interview and write about specific practitioners for a legal blog.
- Volunteer to help out at local or special interest bar association events.
- Volunteer to work the registration table or help out in other ways at school receptions for alumni attorneys, or at other non-student events like CLEs.
- Do the research to find an organization where your “dream job” exists. Then volunteer at that organization, if a paid position isn't available. This will get you in the door and give you the opportunity to be noticed – and appreciated for your skills, initiative, enthusiasm and dedication.

3. ATTEND LAW-RELATED FUNCTIONS OF THE BAR ASSOCIATION, SCHOOL, INNS OF COURT OR OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Prepare for the event- and go!

- Pump yourself up for the event – dress up a bit, set some initial goals, and practice introducing yourself.
- Have conversation topics ready – be familiar with current events, especially legal issues, by reading the legal press, web sites, blogs or newspapers.*
- Bring a friend if you want support, but agree to meet at the end so you'll spend your time meeting *new* people.

Strategies for working the event

- Pretend you're one of the hosts. If you're busy making others feel welcome, you'll be less shy. Introduce people, start conversations, show folks to the food!
- Eye contact and smiles are key. Circulate and try to meet several people (rather than spending all your time with people you already know.)
- Be sure you are conversing more than eating. (Eat before the event!)

- Remember names: Have the person repeat her name when introduced if necessary; use her name during the conversation to help you memorize it.
- Ask for a business card at the end of the conversation and say: “It’s been great meeting you. I’m looking forward to contacting you soon to talk further.”

Say something- anything!*

- Don’t Wait – initiate the conversation! Ask questions to get people talking.
- Take a risk – talk to strangers. They won’t be strangers once you break the ice. Most people are grateful to be approached at these events! Share information about yourself, and build a dialogue.

After the event

- Write reminder notes on the back of business cards – where and when you met the person, type of practice, topics discussed.
- Follow up on promises made ASAP. If you said you’d send an article, do it now.
- Send “nice to meet you” notes.

4. ATTEND INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS!

An informational interview is:

- **An informal discussion** in which you gather information on areas of law, types of practice, employer culture, legal trends, career options, and other topics.
- **A way to build your network of contacts** while your contact also increases theirs.
- **An entry** into the hidden job market.
- **It is NOT a job interview.** People are more likely to help you if you come seeking information, not focused on a job.

Tips for setting up Informational Interviews

Call or email with a quick introduction: give your **name, school, year in law school, and why you are interested in speaking with that person.** State up front that you are interested in getting advice and information (not asking for a job.) Ask if they have 15-20 minutes to meet.

It is best to meet in the attorney’s office so as not to waste their time. If they prefer not to meet in the office, you can ask to meet for coffee or lunch. If they agree to meet, send a thank you email confirming the time.

Do not send an email with all the questions you have prepared. It is inconsiderate of the person's time to expect them to respond thoughtfully to multiple questions over email. At the same time, have a specific "ask" in your email so that they see you have already done some thinking ("I wanted to learn more about the path you took....how you got yourself out to New York, what advice you might have for a law student looking to enter this field...etc.")

Tips for Conducting Informational Interviews

Prepare Ahead of Time:

Research your contact, their organization and practice.

Arrive early and **dress professionally.**

Know your "Asks" in advance to show them you are prepared and respectful of their time. See below for questions.

Bring a copy of your resume and offer it only if:

They request it.

You established a rapport and feel comfortable asking for advice about it.

Be prepared to take notes, but don't let your note-taking detract from the natural flow of the conversation.

At The Meeting (Format):

Thank your contact for meeting with you!

If a Referral: Begin the meeting by mentioning the person who referred you or the mutual connection and your reason for setting up the meeting.

Overview: Give a brief overview of yourself and your areas of interest. If you need help with your "Elevator Pitch" come to the Career Office to practice it.

Ask your questions. Bring a list of questions, but keep the conversation going by asking follow-up questions.

Listen! This is not a job interview so the focus is on the person with whom you are meeting. For the most part, you should be listening rather than speaking.

Get names of other people in the field, practice area or organization with whom you might speak. Ask **who** else you can talk to.

Watch the time. If time is running out, mention this. If they say it is all right to stay, then do so.

Ask to stay in touch and thank the person for their time and advice.

Ask for referrals! Who else might be helpful to speak with?

Possible Questions to Ask:

Ask open ended questions to encourage conversation. These sample questions should help you formulate your own questions.

How did you obtain your job? What career track did you follow?

What career paths have you seen other people follow to this particular practice area?

In your opinion, what areas of law are experiencing the most growth?

What are the legal trends in your area of law?

What changes do you anticipate in your practice area in the next five years?

What is your employer/job like? What is a typical day/week/month like for you?

What project(s) are you working on right now?

When you first started out (with this employer), how long did it take for you to have the opportunity to conduct a deposition? Argue a motion? Conduct a trial? Handle a closing?

What excites you about your work? Why did you choose this job/field/employer?

What type of training is necessary to enter this practice area/field? How did you obtain specialized training?

What type of skills does your office look for when you hire people in this field?

What professional associations or groups are advantageous to join in this field?

What type of person succeeds in this field? What are the skills necessary?

What problems or issues are facing this employer/practice/area of law?

What opportunities exist for growth, professional development, and client development?

What are the major rewards/frustrations of your job?

If you could do it over again, what would you do differently?

What do you wish you had known when entering this field?

Do you have any advice on the best way to market oneself to enter this field?

Do you have any tips on interviewing successfully?

Would you mind taking a look at my resume and giving me any advice or suggestions you might have for its improvement? (Ask for this near the end of the informational interview because you don't want to cut the conversation short.)

What professional materials/publications should I be reading in this field?

If you have salary concerns, this is a great time to get that information by asking about salary ranges for given jobs or levels.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW:

Review your notes, formulate new questions, ask yourself how you feel about the field /work/employer.

Send a thank you letter within 24-48 hours.

By Email: In most cases it's fine to do this via email (as long as you avoid casual email format/spelling/grammar), but use your judgment, based on the rapport between you and your contact.

By Mail: If they are more formal ("old school"), send a hardcopy thank you note or letter.

Mention the topics you discussed and whether or not you utilized their referrals.

MOST IMPORTANTLY, keep in touch with the practitioner.

Send links to articles they might be interested in, holiday cards, or notes updating your progress

Follow up with additional questions

Follow up on suggestions and update them that you did so.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD RECORD-KEEPING

Keeping good records while searching for a job is very important. For example, you will want to remember that you left a voicemail message for someone who calls you two months later.

Organize a file folder, notebook, or an electronic cross-referencing system. For instance, if Abby Attorney gives you a referral to Joe Corporate, note it on both Abby's and Joe's files or cards.

Cross-reference by name of organization, type of law, name of individual.

Note the dates you called, met with, or wrote to individuals. Also note whether you said that you would take a certain action by a specific date to ensure follow-through.

Keep copies of all your correspondence.

ADDITIONAL READING

(available in the Career Office):

**Donna Gerson, *Building Career Connections: Networking Tools for Law Students and New Lawyers* (NALP 2007)

Cynthia Chin-Lee, *It's Who You Know: The Magic of Networking In Person and on the Internet* (BookPartners, Inc, 1998)

Kimm Walton, *Guerrilla Tactics for Getting the Legal Job of Your Dreams*, 2nd ed., (Thomson/West, 2008)

Marcy Lerner, et al., *Vault Guide to Schmoozing* (Vault.com Inc., 2001)

NETWORKING RESOURCES

San Francisco Bay Area

Names, numbers and websites for bar associations can change, so call the State Bar of California at (415) 538-2000 for current numbers, or visit their website at www.calbar.ca.gov. Each county in California has its own Bar Association.

Here are a few of the specialty and minority bars in the Bay Area:

- Alameda County Bar Association (www.acbanet.org)
- Asian American Bar Association (AABA) (www.aaba-bay.com)
- Bar Association of San Francisco (BASF) (www.sfbar.org)
BASF offers numerous committees to join, events to attend, many publications and resources for members.
- Barristers Club of SF – Young Attorney division of BASF (www.sfbar.org/barristers)
- Bay Area Lawyers for Individual Freedom (BALIF) – LGBT Bar Assn. (www.balif.org)
- Charles Houston Bar Association (African-American Bar)(www.charleshoustonbar.org)
- Contra Costa County Bar Association (www.cccba.org)
- Filipino Bar Association of Northern California (FBANC) (<http://fbanc.org>)
- La Raza Lawyers Association of SF (<http://larazalawyers.org>)
- Lawyers Club of SF (www.lawyersclubsf.com)
- Marin County Bar Association (MCBA) (www.marinbar.org)
- Marin County Women Lawyers (www.mcwlawyers.org)
- Queen’s Bench of the Greater Bay Area (www.queensbench.org)
- San Francisco Trial Lawyers Association (SFTLA) (www.sftla.org)
- San Mateo County Bar Association, San Mateo County Barristers (www.smcba.org)
- South Asian Bar Association of Northern California (www.southasianbar.org/)

State Organizations

- State Bar of California (www.calbar.ca.gov)
- California Lawyers for the Arts (www.calawyersforthearts.org)
- California District Attorneys Association (<http://cdaa.org/>)
- California Public Defenders Association (<http://www.cpda.org/>)
- Consumer Attorneys of California (<http://www.caoc.com/CA/>)
- California Women Lawyers (www.cwl.org)

National Organizations

- American Bar Association/ Law Students Division (<http://www.abanet.org/lstd/home.html>)
- American Association for Justice (www.justice.org)
- National Lawyers Guild (Local chapters in Bay Area) (www.nlg.org)
- Minority and specialty bar associations usually have national versions (local bar associations should have contact information)