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# 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?

- 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.
- 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.
- *Get an alumni mentor!* Attend an Alumni Mentor Program Briefing or make an appointment to meet with the Alumni Mentor Program Director. Use your mentor(s) as a springboard to more contacts.
- *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, and a way to make contacts in the legal community.
- Help organize a career panel for a student organization, and recruit local attorneys as panelists.
- Volunteer to research and write for a legal blog or local bar association publication.
- 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.

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

### ***Prepare for the event- and go!***

- 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 you’d like to keep in touch.

***Say something- anything!\****

- Don't Wait – initiate the conversation! Ask questions to get people talking.
- Take a risk – talk to strangers. Most people are grateful to be approached at these events!

***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, etc.
- **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. (Since you requested this meeting, be prepared to pay.) 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.

Have questions to show them you are prepared and respectful of their time.

Bring a copy of your resume and offer it only if they request it, or you have established a rapport and you feel comfortable asking for advice about it.

#### **At the Meeting:**

Thank your contact for meeting with you!

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, and 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.

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

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 at Networking Events and Informational Interviews:**

Ask open ended questions to encourage conversation. These sample questions should help you formulate your own questions. Please do not just bring this list of questions with you; use it to generate your own, genuine, relevant 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 types 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:**

Send a thank you email within 24-48 hours, and keep in touch!

### **ADDITIONAL READING**

(available in the Career Office):

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

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

## 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](http://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](http://www.acbanet.org))
- Asian American Bar Association (AABA) ([www.aaba-bay.com](http://www.aaba-bay.com))
- Bar Association of San Francisco (BASF) ([www.sfbar.org](http://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](http://www.sfbar.org/barristers))
- Bay Area Lawyers for Individual Freedom (BALIF) – LGBT Bar Assn. ([www.balif.org](http://www.balif.org))
- Charles Houston Bar Association (African-American Bar) ([www.charleshoustonbar.org](http://www.charleshoustonbar.org))
- Contra Costa County Bar Association ([www.cccbba.org](http://www.cccbba.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](http://www.lawyersclubsf.com))
- Marin County Bar Association (MCBA) ([www.marinbar.org](http://www.marinbar.org))
- Marin County Women Lawyers ([www.mcwlawyers.org](http://www.mcwlawyers.org))
- Queen's Bench of the Greater Bay Area ([www.queensbench.org](http://www.queensbench.org))
- San Francisco Trial Lawyers Association (SFTLA) ([www.sftla.org](http://www.sftla.org))
- San Mateo County Bar Association, San Mateo County Barristers ([www.smcba.org](http://www.smcba.org))
- South Asian Bar Association of Northern California ([www.southasianbar.org/](http://www.southasianbar.org/))

### State Organizations

- State Bar of California ([www.calbar.ca.gov](http://www.calbar.ca.gov))
- California Lawyers for the Arts ([www.calawyersforthearts.org](http://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](http://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](http://www.justice.org))
- National Lawyers Guild (Local chapters in Bay Area) ([www.nlg.org](http://www.nlg.org))
- Minority and specialty bar associations usually have national versions (local bar associations should have contact information)