How To Use Your Summer Effectively: Networking On The Job & In The Job Search

During your summer, you will definitely be assessed on the QUALITY of your work. However, you will also be assessed on more subjective and less tangible measures like: YOUR ATTITUDE and YOUR RELATIONSHIPS.

Thus, you must ensure not only that your work product is of the highest caliber (see Impeccable Work Product Tipsheet) but that you are enthusiastic, engaged, and that the people with whom you work get to know you on a personal level.

Networking on the Job: The Other Half of the Equation

The Mindset: Networking is so fully integrated into the work and lives of lawyers that it is not so much a separate activity as it is an unconscious aspect of every action.

The Goal: Getting other people emotionally invested in your advancement and success.

Networking on the Job: The Essentials

Professional Networking Requires Personal Relationships: “Relationships are all there is....Nothing exists in isolation.”

Tip: Get Up From Behind Your Desk! Successful networking requires you to get out there, to be in the mix. Go to a supervisor’s office to discuss a project or deliver an assignment as opposed to calling or attaching it to an email.

Tip: Never Eat Alone. Keep your social and event calendar full. Work hard to remain visible and active, and don’t let easy opportunities to connect slip by. Take advantage of: the early breakfast, lunch, and drinks after work. Invite someone to share a workout or a hobby of common interest. Ask to accompany attorneys to client meetings or hearings to observe.

Tip: Remember that networking is NOT a “numbers game.” Your goal is to develop genuine connections with people you can count on to be your champion long after you’ve left. Therefore, DON’T JUST SCHMOOZE! It is ALWAYS better to spend more time with fewer people at get-togethers having meaningful dialogues than to engage in the “wandering eye routine.”

Tip: Be Sincere Across The Board. Do not fall into the trap of ignoring or treating poorly those “without power.” No one is beneath you, and all in the office environment deserve you equal attention and respect. Assessments – whether good or bad – from seasoned support staff often carry great weight in the review process.

Tip: Stay “Visible” By Taking On The Project No One Else Wants.

Tip: Follow Up or Fail. Follow up is the key to success. You’ve got to make sure a new acquaintance retains your name and the favorable impression you’ve created. Send a short thank you note or email, ideally within 12 to 24 hours after a meeting. If you had a good lunch with someone, suggest doing it again next week and perhaps bring others into the fold with you.

Tip: Treat pro bono or volunteer projects with the same level of care, urgency, and enthusiasm as other matters.

Networking in the Job Search: The Essentials

Tip: Know & Use Your Existing Network. Most people have no idea how wide their existing network already is. Take the time to research and list: relatives, friends of relatives, spouse’s relatives & contacts, members of professional & social organizations, current & former customers/clients, parents of friends, neighbors past & present, people you went to school with, and people in your religious congregation.
Tip: Start With Those You Know Best. The more comfortable you become with “informational interviews” and other networking opportunities, the more you will get out of them. Since conversations come easier the more you have them, “practice” on those you know well. Save the meetings with more senior decision-makers or your more promising contacts until you feel more comfortable and can concisely articulate what you bring to the table.

Tip: Remember Career Karma. How much you give to the people you come into contact with often determines how much you will receive in return. Successfully connecting with others is NEVER just about getting what you want.

Tip: Develop Your Brand. In order for a network to have value once created, you’ve got to know what to do with it. To get those in your network excited to help you, you’ve got to get them to “buy in” to who you are and where you want to go. That’s where your BRAND comes in. Your BRAND is your MESSAGE. Through your contacts with others, you must be deliberate about and clear in your message, so that you help shape what others will think whenever they hear your name.

THEREFORE …

Tip: Know What You Want BEFORE Contacting Anyone. Work out any preliminary personal issues first. Know where you want to go, what you want to achieve, and how this contact can potentially help you get there in advance. Without a clear objective on the horizon, few will be able to truly help you. Do not expect that a contact will become your personal career advisor.

Tip: Prepare, Prepare, Prepare! In order to build a credible reputation, you’ve got to demonstrate both a knowledge base and a genuine interest in the area. Prepare questions in advance that show you have researched the market/practice area. Don’t ask anything you could answer through an internet search or other basic research.

Tip: Take The Pressure Off The Contact. Never “ask” for a job. Most people with whom you connect will not have a job up their sleeve, and people generally don’t like to enter into a conversation or a relationship in which they can’t deliver. So, if you want them to be of greatest help, TAKE THE PRESSURE OFF. Ask for advice on the marketplace. Ask for insights on active practices, inactive practices. Remember that people like to talk about themselves, what they are working on and what they have achieved. Get into a broader conversation and, if they like you, most people will try to help in any way they can.

Tip: Master The Art of The Sound Bite. Be ready to quickly and persuasively answer such basic questions as: What is it you’re looking for? Why does this area interest you? What experience has prepared you for this type of work? What do you want/need from me? If any of these questions appear to catch you off guard, the conversation and, thus, the connection is likely to end sooner than you’d like.

Tip: Be Pleasant To Spend Time With. Networking contacts do not want to hurt their own reputations by referring someone else who is likely to be difficult, unpleasant, or boring in the workplace. Be courteous. Be enthusiastic. Be deferential, even if you believe they’re mistaken. Be respectful of their time.

Tip: Take Notes And Get Organized! Keep very careful records of your meetings: who you’ve talked to, advice they’ve given you, any additional leads/referrals, when you need/intend to follow up. After the 10th or 20th meeting you have had, you will need to be able to connect the dots.

Tip: Always Expand The Circle. When meeting with a contact, whether in person or over the phone, always end the conversation with a request for additional referrals. “Do you know anyone else I should be speaking with about…?” Also, ask if you can mention their name when reaching out to those referred.

The Importance of Repetition – The Research

People you’re contacting to create a new relationship need to see or hear your name in at least three different modes of communication - by, say, email, phone call and face-to-face meeting - before there is substantive recognition. Then, once you have gained some early recognition, you need to mature a developing relationship with additional contacts at least once a month.

WHICH IS WHY …

Tip: Follow Up Is Key. 95% of people never follow up at all. Therefore, those that do are automatically miles ahead of the game. While email is acceptable, a handwritten thank you note can particularly capture a person’s attention.
Timeliness is critical. Always express gratitude. Be sure to include an item of interest from your meeting — moment of humor, etc. Courteously reaffirm whatever commitments you each made. Never forget to follow-up with those that acted as a go-between for you and the other person. Give them an update and thank them for their help.

Tip: Follow Up Must Be Genuine. The true value of networking lies in genuine and deliberate follow up. Some suggestions are: remembering contacts’ birthdays; sending contacts a case or article you know will be of interest; if you know they’ll be taking a vacation next month, follow up in six weeks and see how it went; if you know they have an important client meeting coming up next month, calendar it and wish him or her good luck. This is how the real contacts are made, and these are the people who will be most likely to help when you need it.

Tip: Don’t Be Shortsighted. Don’t let the results of your networking efforts fall apart! Whatever you do, DO NOT drop your contacts after you’ve achieved your immediate goal. Remember, a network is an ongoing, and ever expanding, set of relationships to be maintained, cultivated and (hopefully) leveraged into future opportunities throughout your entire career.