

## **Network Now- Reap Rewards Later!**

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For nearly two years, I was the primary in-house lawyer for “The Jerry Springer Show.” OK, sure, I have some wild stories to share. But this article isn’t about me, or about Jerry Springer. It’s about you...and how you can obtain the same type of opportunities other lawyers and I have received...through the power of networking.

The only reason I even knew the Springer job existed was because after leaving the law firm where I had worked for nearly seven years, I reached out and invited one of the firm’s partners and a mentor of mine to lunch. During the meal, he casually mentioned the Springer opening and I, of course, jumped at it! Again, this article isn’t about the Springer job. It’s about keeping in touch with as many people as possible, since you never know when they might turn you on to a golden opportunity. I could have easily let my relationship with this partner languish, but I didn’t. And because of my efforts to stay in touch, I now have a far keener insight into the world of stripper love triangles and ‘hillbilly smackdowns’ than I ever thought possible (and, more seriously, I have In-House Counsel, NBC Universal on my resume).

I also met my fiancée through networking. Shortly after being offered the Springer position, I called another former colleague to ask if I should take the job. During our conversation, she told me about a friend she thought I should meet. Had I not contacted that former colleague purely to ask career advice, I wouldn’t be getting married this spring.

The point here is that networking works! And the sooner you accept this maxim, the better off you will be...personally and professionally.

## **Starting to Build a Book of Business**

In these turbulent times, law firm partners are expected to amass a substantial book of business – to help keep themselves, their support staff and their firms busy and profitable. This means you need a stable of clients that consistently provides you with work, and that you must be adding new clients all the time – and you must accomplish both while fulfilling all the other tasks expected of a top-notch attorney. Hey, no one said it was going to be easy!

No wonder so many mid-level associates panic. When you are trapped in the office until the wee hours, in the depths of ‘associate despair,’ it often seems flat-out impossible to accomplish all that is being asked of you, especially in terms of client development. Most attorneys don’t know where to begin. They certainly don’t teach you how to ‘build a book of business’ in law school. The difficulty of getting your own clients and developing new business are the primary reasons skilled associates jump off the partnership track and look for new careers. One of the ways to avoid this problem is to start networking...right now!

**Just Do It!**

As we all know, lawyering is not rocket science or brain surgery. Even the best brief writers, deal negotiators and client counselors have no guarantee of success. The unspoken truth is that there are 100 other lawyers waiting in line who are just as good as you. Being a skilled attorney is only a start. What ultimately makes you successful is if clients are willing to pay you for your services. *How do you get paid, you ask?* Answer: *You get clients.* Next question: *How do you get clients?* Answer: *Well, they generally don't come knocking on your door. You have to go out and get them!*

For the newly-minted partner who has been laboring away in an office for the last seven to ten years, and who has been ignoring emails for lunch and dinner dates, requests to join boards and non-profit groups, and even (gulp!) deleting Facebook and LinkedIn invites, it can be very awkward to start playing catch-up. It will be fairly transparent to old friends, colleagues and classmates when you finally emerge from nearly a decade of self-inflicted hibernation and start handing out business cards, in an attempt to be social.

You can avoid this problem by incorporating networking into your life years before you make partner, so that what should appear as a sincere effort to offer your services to those closest to you doesn't come off as cold, ambitious and desperate. It can be quite challenging to shoot emails to your former classmates or colleagues out of the blue asking them to meet you at Chipotle's for lunch or join you at a charity benefit. But the people you contact will likely appreciate your attempts to keep alive the friendship or relationship and/or be impressed that you made the effort to connect.

Don't expect immediate results, though, especially if you start networking in or immediately after law school. The chances are close to nil that the law school classmate who sat next to you in Torts class is going to be named a GC any time soon, let alone at a company with enough money to pay your exorbitant law firm fees. And if you're attempting a career transition, the meetings may not lead to helpful information right off the bat, but believe me, they will pay off. You will be planting important seeds for the future. The seeds will take time to grow and some will die off, but most will flourish, often in ways you least expect. So plant as many as possible.

You need to network all the time, with all sorts of people. There will be times, however, when your networking efforts will be guided by very precise goals. Looking for a new job? Then, *get out and network!* Ask your friends and colleagues to recommend a good recruiter and to let you know about any opportunities they hear of. Are you a third-year law student trying to find out what an entertainment lawyer actually does? Then, *get out and network!* Contact well-known entertainment lawyers in your area and invite them for coffee. Are you considering a departure from the practice of law but you don't know what path to choose? *G-O-A-N!*

We've all heard stories about the wonders of networking. How about Partner X, who first met the GC of Company A (now a client that pays \$2 million in legal fees every year) when they were on the same charity board 20 years ago? Or Partner Y, who was invited to enter a "beauty contest" to represent Company B in a \$100 million class action lawsuit because her law school classmate is now the company's vice president and she stayed in touch with him? Perhaps Partners X and Y were just lucky. Trust me; they weren't. They worked hard over the years to

develop those relationships and keep them alive. When work was particularly busy or stressful or when faced with their own domestic demands, it would have been much easier to let those relationships die, but they didn't. And now they are reaping the rewards of proper network maintenance.

### **Start Slow**

Like the most successful weight loss programs and climate change initiatives, the best way to get into networking is to start small, with baby steps. Assign yourself some simple and reachable goals. Here are five suggestions:

- How frequently do you have lunch dates? If the answer is under three times a week, add one more date to your weekly schedule.
- How involved are you with your community? If the answer is "I'm not," think about joining your condo board, your church or synagogue, a charity board, running for City Council, or assistant coaching your kid's little league team. All are viable options that will get you into the swing of things and introduce you to new people.
- Schedule one fairly involved networking event every three months (at a minimum). Make it something you enjoy, whether it's a golf outing, a couples' night at the theatre, a sports event, or a charity function.
- Keep up on Facebook and LinkedIn. These social networking sites, and others like them, are easy, free and valuable. If you are worried about them being time sucks, allot yourself a specific amount of time to spend on them each week.
- Respond to phone calls and emails from people in your network. Not answering them communicates a very unfriendly message: "You are so unimportant that I couldn't find ten seconds in the day to write back to you." No one is that busy. Find the ten seconds. If you can't stop what you are doing at the moment, write yourself a note, and respond later that night or the next morning. Don't let important contacts get away from you.

Yes, your life will become busier after you embrace networking. Yes, networking is work. But it should also be fun – you can dine out at fabulous restaurants, go to star-studded affairs and functions (sometimes on your employer's dime), and take a break from the daily grind to see your friends and discover new developments in their lives. For the most part, you have a choice regarding who is in your network – if you don't want to keep in touch with certain acquaintances, then don't. Bring people into your network that you are excited to know.

Remember, skill in the actual practice of law is only one component to being a successful attorney. Whether it's a matter of landing clients, securing an in-house position, changing careers, or finding your future spouse, chances are you won't succeed by sitting at your desk. You have to get out there and network. Don't be afraid; just do it. Your life and career are at stake.

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