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## THE PLACE TO NETWORK

### Go Get 'Em, Tigers!

#### *Top Ten Tips for Lawyer Networking*

By Christy Burke

*Editor's Note: With this column, we say goodbye to Christy Burke. As she says in her column, she has been at the helm of "The Place to Network" for the past three years and for that we are exceedingly grateful. Christy is a shining star in our profession and I will miss her insight into the ever-changing world of networking. Christy will remain on our Board and, she has said that she will contribute to the newsletter when she can. In February, Tim Corcoran of Altman Weil will begin writing this column. A profile of Tim will appear with his first column.*

All I can say is ... WOW! In the past three years of writing "The Place to Network" column for *Marketing the Law Firm*, I have had the distinct pleasure of interviewing lawyers and law firm marketing executives about their fascinating, innovative strategies for networking to develop business. I have also had the honor to work with the brilliant and legendary Betiayn Tursi, my editor-in-chief and mentor. How many superlatives can I fit into one sentence? Don't get me started!

A lot of people seem to perceive networking as a shallow activity engaged in by lawyers who missed their calling as used-car salespeople. Not so! I have personally verified that this is not the case, since I have spoken directly with many attorneys for my articles. In fact, many lawyers who engage in networking are actively helping people through pro bono work, charity work and volunteerism. Others are keeping their ears open to help colleagues' businesses and lives flourish, and are rewarded in-kind with grateful referrals that enable them to meet clients' needs.

Boiling down the past three years' worth of research on this topic, I can distinguish ten major points that connect the best lawyer rainmakers. By following these tips, you are sure to make your way to the top of your networking game.

#### **TOP TEN TIPS FOR LAWYER NETWORKING**

**1. Be Creative.** Everyone thinks of going to the Chamber of Commerce events and schmoozing with the regulars who attend, and there's nothing wrong with that, except that *everyone* thinks of it! Be original. Create a local seminar series like Sara Hanley of Place and Hanley PLLC did. Sara is a family and matrimonial lawyer based in North Carolina who teamed up with other professionals to deliver a program to help women going through divorce. She helped these women by educating them, and several of them became her clients afterward.

**2. Be Smart with Your Time.** A very smart lawyer gave me a brilliant tip once. She said when you're going to a holiday party, don't bring your coat. Otherwise, you'll get stuck for 20 minutes on the coat-check line and you'll miss out on crucial networking time. Think through how you can get the most networking time in, given your busy schedule, and remember even minor timesavers like leaving your coat in the car or the office.

**3. Be Nice.** You walk into a networking event and you see people standing by the wall, alone. And what do you ordinarily do? You ignore those people. How about going up to them and saying hello? Chris Colvin, Partner at Kramer Levin, told me many stellar ideas about networking, and one of them was to go over to networking wallflowers and talk to them, especially if you are on your own, too. And if someone has spinach in her teeth or a nametag on upside-down, tell her! I have made great contacts by simply having the courtesy and forwardness to save others from embarrassment.

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4. *Listen More Than You Talk.* A very wise person once said to me that most people don't actually listen — they just wait for the chance to talk again. Not good! When you allow people to express themselves fully and finish their sentences, you are accomplishing two things. First, you make them feel comfortable with you because you are hearing them out and not hard-selling them. Second, you are giving them what they have hoped for — a chance to talk about their favorite subject — themselves! Dale Carnegie drives this point home in *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. If you've never read it, please, please pick up a copy.

5. *Do Your Homework.* Lawyers know how to research and prepare properly. Otherwise, how did they get through law school and pass the Bar, right? Well, apply those skills to the events you attend. Whether it's a CLE class, a conference, a municipal event or an alumni gathering, do what you can to make the most of it. Get the attendee list ahead of time, ask the organizers to introduce you to people you want to meet.

6. *Eat, Drink and Be Merry.* Breakfast, lunch, coffee, drinks, dinner — all of these are opportunities to set up meetings or attend events. If you are squirreling away in your office and going home every day right after work, you are definitely stunting your networking growth. Whether it's a client, prospect, colleague, employee, friend, relative or even a competitor, all of these fall within your networking sphere. Don't you want these people to have a strong

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impression of you and your legal skills in case they have opportunity to send business your way? And don't discount junior-level people as not worth developing relationships with. My first-ever column, "Lunching Up," described how to leapfrog your way to meeting a GC by first taking out mid-level people and getting recommended up the chain.

7. *Be Brave.* You're good at what you do, aren't you? And you're also a nice interesting person, I would imagine. Then why is it so hard for you to go up to strangers and talk to them? Because you, like all of us, are all plagued by the fear of what others will think of you, especially if you stick your neck out and talk about how good you are. And it's nonsense. Remember, people aren't really thinking of you anyway — they're thinking of themselves, so why not give it a shot and either call them, go up to them at events, or deliberately sit next to an actual person instead of choosing the seat surrounded by an island of empty chairs. It takes a lot less energy to do that than it does to sit alone in a room full of people, kicking yourself the whole time for not meeting anyone.

8. *Use Social Networking, It's Free!* Are you allergic to the Internet? I didn't think so! So why are you ignoring the fruitful networking opportunities presented by sites like Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, JD Supra and blogging? These are free ways to connect with people and advertise yourself and your services. One of my clients, Todd Gerstein of Smart WebParts, said that using LinkedIn for his recent Smart Time software launch was like getting a 50,000-piece mailing for free. If you are baffled by these tools, ask a colleague (or a teenager) to show you the ropes. It's actually not very complicated at all, once you learn the basics. Plus, with the number of traditional newspapers and magazines dwindling, these informal digital venues are the up-and-coming ways to distribute information about yourself and to showcase your legal acumen.

9. *Don't Drop the Ball.* You never get a second chance to make a first impression. And you also never get a

second chance to make a second impression, either. If you return from an event and toss the business cards that you gathered into your desk drawer, you have largely wasted the time spent obtaining them. How about writing those contacts an e-mail, a personal handwritten note with an interesting article enclosed, or even calling them on the phone? Neglecting follow-up is the downfall of many professionals, so don't let it be yours.

10. *Do What You Love — And Have Fun!* When you enjoy what you're doing, you give off a positive vibration that naturally attracts other people. However, if you are downcast, angry or worried, that will repel others from you. If you're not excited about networking, look for different avenues that could be more enriching for you. If you're not thrilled about the type of law you are practicing, that will come through and make you a less compelling candidate for consideration. Find your calling and clients will come knocking on your door because they intuitively sense your sincerity and know you will be delightful to work with.

## CONCLUSION

Networking for lawyers is not bad-tasting medicine that needs to be taken with Mary Poppins' spoonful of sugar. Instead, it can be an enriching, rewarding and dynamic experience which challenges you to go beyond yourself and make extraordinary efforts, not just ordinary ones. There are endless possibilities for you, depending on all the things that make you an individual. Do you speak other languages? What is your ethnic and educational background? Can you be of help to an underserved area? There is no one else exactly like you — no one else can make the same footprints that you do. Be inspired by knowing that you can seek out the people that will understand how great a lawyer, and human being, that you are. And I would wager that there are many more of them out there than you think!

