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THE PLACE TO NETWORK

2L Summer Networking

*How Law Students Can Make The Most of This Summer***By Christy Burke**

Summertime ... and the law students are uneasy. Summer associate programs have historically been 12-week courtships where law firms would wine, dine and groom the best and brightest law students, intending to offer most or all of them employment when the summer was over.

These days, however, it's a totally new ball game. Programs are being slashed from 12 to 10 or even 8 weeks and the sheer number of summer associates overall has dropped considerably. Due to recent downsizing at firms, there are simply not as many slots available, so the competition is fierce to get summer associate positions. And even if you do land one of these coveted spots, you are still not guaranteed a job offer at the end of the summer.

So what can a law student do to extract the most possible value out of their summer, whether they have a summer associate position or not? Network!

DEVELOPING 'SOFT SKILLS'

Bo Kim is Manager of Legal Recruiting and Diversity Initiative for Vedder Price (www.vedderprice.com). She notes that the firm's summer associates program is half the size of last year's, and the students were primarily selected because they attended top law schools and had superior grades.

However, she believes that "soft skills" are what is going to make them really fit in at the firm and warrant a job offer at summer's end. "Networking is incredibly important so our summers can showcase their talents and develop relationships with other lawyers. It's essential for them to display confidence and not be nervous." Ms. Kim also notes that summers should beware standing out in a negative way, by being abrasive or high maintenance. Firms won't tolerate bad behavior, especially on a highly competitive playing field — there are certainly many more law students than available jobs, so a good attitude and the ability to assimilate at the firm are highly valued characteristics.

RELEVANT TRAINING

Darien Fleming, Manager of Professional Development and Training at Brown Rudnick (www.brownrudnick.com), notes that her department is working hard to give its summer associates relevant training and intuitive tools so they can become the best lawyers they can be. She says, "We're all experiencing a different legal market — this year, summer associates at all firms need to step up their game. We advise summers to make an investment in themselves, to take advantage of all the training opportunities available — no training is a waste of time. That way, no matter where their future takes them, they are armed with the tools for success."

Ms. Fleming has seen great success with summer associates through use of a creative new program called the "Legal Mocktail" (www.legalmocktail.com). The Legal Mocktail was originally co-developed by Catherine Alman MacDonagh, the president of the Legal Sales and Service Organization (www.legalsales.org) and Roberta Montafia. The Legal Mocktail is a dynamic, interactive networking training session that allows summers to mix, mingle and practice making connections with simulated prospective business associates in a fun, social setting. Fleming credits the Legal Mocktail as "the best tool we have right now, and it can be used over and over again. When you bring networking to a level that's social, people absorb it and aren't dreading it — they actually like doing it."

MacDonagh explains that the Legal Mocktail works like a huge-scale role play, reminiscent of the How to Host a Murder parties that were popular in the 80s. Basically, each participant is assigned a persona which they pretend to be during the networking session, including an assumed name, job position and some facts about the character (you're a wine connoisseur; you have an uncle in the contracting business, etc.). Then the Legal Mocktail is a facilitated networking

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session where the summer associates enjoy real cocktails and meet each other, all the while looking to make connections with others that may lead to business. MacDonagh notes, "For a summer associate, the Legal Mocktail networking training program presents a unique and safe opportunity to develop and practice making a memorable introduction, entering and exiting conversations, and the all-important follow up, all of which are critical to becoming a successful lawyer — and a first year associate."

CREATIVITY

Creativity is certainly a crucial element to law school staff who are helping students find jobs and summer associate positions, especially in an economic downturn. Cinnamon Baker is Director of Career Services at the Barry University School of Law in central Florida. Baker works hard to procure opportunities for Barry's law students and to assist them to create their own, and creativity is the overarching theme. Ms. Baker says, "Law students need to think outside the box. I encourage them to attend CLE programs — they can make genuine connections with lawyers there and they don't need to be a member to go. Students should pick the brains of their career services personnel — they're already paying for their help in the tuition costs so why not take advantage of the assistance?"

Baker also suggests that law students think beyond the realm of the legal community and engage in networking events that are not the typical, stuffy legal networking functions. She recalls a judicial reception which was being put on by the young lawyers of a county bar association. Her department offered the first five students to sign up a 50% discount on the attendance fee. Of those five who did attend, three of them made great connections with judges and got summer internships. The other two also made

excellent contacts. She also remembers a May '08 graduate who passed the Bar and was licensed in October, but who worked at Starbucks while she looked for a legal position. Recently, the young lawyer was offered a job by a solo practitioner who created a new position for her at which she is making \$10K more a year than the typical law school graduate. Baker said that what set this young lady apart was that she was constantly networking when she wasn't working at Starbucks, attending Happy Hours, and doing her "elevator speech" wherever she went.

John Marshall Law School student Brandon DeBerry did obtain the Holy Grail — a summer associate position at Schiff Hardin. He got the position through attending the Cook County Bar Association job fair. DeBerry is excited about the eight-week summer program (shortened from last year's 12-week one), but he realizes that a summer associate position doesn't automatically guarantee him a job offer at the end of the summer, and that he will have to work hard to impress the attorneys he will be working for. DeBerry plans to network within the firm and to build strong relationships with the lawyers and other summer associates he works with. He suggests that established lawyers can be a great resource for law students. "Many attorneys want to help law students — they know what it's like to struggle to find a job as a law student, so ask for their advice. Also, befriend your classmates and remember that upperclassmen were in your shoes only six months ago so you can watch them and learn."

DeBerry's classmate at John Marshall, Brandon Rogers, is a go-getter with networking as a top priority. However, his original summer associate position fell through when the stock market crashed in early '09. Instead of wallowing in this misfortune, Rogers decided to be proactive. He created a list of friends, family and business associates and set a schedule to contact each person on a monthly or quarterly basis. He used every association and membership at his disposal, including mining his college fraternity ties.

From this continuous stream of activity, Rogers landed two positions for the summer, both of which are in

keeping with his eventual goal of doing commercial real estate law with an environmental bent. The first position is with the JAG office at a veteran's clinic in Illinois for 15-20 hours per week, which will expose him to a number of experiences including legislative drafting. Rogers hopes to use this knowledge down the line to lobby and push issues he chooses to advocate for that will advance his professional advancement. The second is an environmental position at the Illinois Attorney General's office 20-30 hours per week. Not afraid of hard work and long hours, Rogers notes that both positions will put him in good company to help further his career.

When asked to reveal his networking strategies, Rogers says, "Don't wait until your mid-30s to start networking. All you have to do is invite someone to lunch or make that phone call." He emphasizes that law students often lose the nerve to actually ask someone to help them. "Don't be afraid to 'make the ask' because if you don't ask for something, people won't give it to you. If you don't ask, you're just spinning your wheels in the mud."

CONCLUSION

The net message is, if you're a law student, it's probably not a wise idea to take it easy this summer. Now is the time to be smart and to network. If you do have a summer associate position, make the most of it. Show up each day with a positive attitude and make a favorable impression on the lawyers you're working for, as well as the legal staff and your peers you'll be working alongside of. If you don't have a summer associate gig, put together your own internships and opportunities by mining your list of contacts, attending events and asking people for help.

Even if you have to patch together two or more jobs, paid or unpaid, it will stand you in good stead to have solid names and experience on your resume. If you actively network this summer, when you start seeing those annoying "Back to School" commercials in August, you'll be confident that you've set yourself up well for your third year, and your outlook for the future will be much brighter to boot!



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