

Networking Without Treating People as a Means to an End: Six Tips for Students

by Anna Marshall

As legal career professionals, we know that networking is the most effective resource for — and an essential element of — any successful legal job search, especially in these difficult economic times. Mention “networking” to most law students and you will likely get an instantaneous negative reaction. Often, students are intimidated by the idea of asking someone they have never met for help with their job search. Their reluctance to network typically stems from a fundamental misunderstanding of what networking is and the important role it plays in their professional development. The following tips are intended as advice to help students overcome their negative stereotypes about networking and help them make it part of their professional lives.

1. Remember that you already have a network! Your friends, family, classmates, coworkers, and former employers count as networking contacts.
2. Expand your network by reaching out to people in whom you are genuinely interested. You may think you want to litigate, but the best way to confirm that (or rule it out) is to talk to someone who does it.
3. You are not asking for a handout. All you are asking from someone is a few minutes of time and some information, which most people are ready, willing, and able to give.
4. Stay in touch and follow up with your networking contacts. Keep them updated not only during your job search, but also throughout your law school career. That

way, you are not just talking to them because you need something from them, but because you genuinely want to maintain and develop your relationship.

5. Reciprocate! Networking is a two-way street. If you feel awkward about asking someone for advice or some of their time, offer to buy them coffee or lunch. Though your contact may not have a referral or a job for you right now, helping that contact now means they are in your debt.
6. Your top priority may be securing a job, but by networking to expand your contacts (even when you have already landed a position or are not currently job searching), you are increasing your chances of hearing about jobs that may not be posted.

The overarching principle of networking is that there is no rule against establishing and maintaining relationships on purpose. The key is following up. Keep your network up to date by communicating your job search and life experiences, and always remember to thank people for helping you.

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