

Tips for Effective Networking

Law school teaches many valuable lessons, but in many cases, the art of networking is not one of them. Attorneys often make the drastic mistake of opening their practice doors with the expectation that clients will come flooding in, with little effort on their part.

A few months later, they find themselves desperate for clients, with minimal profits. To create a successful law practice, you must create and implement a marketing plan that includes both an online presence and good old fashioned networking.

Believe me. I understand your hesitation. If you're anything like me, the word networking conjures thoughts of uncomfortable small talk and picked over party platters. But hopefully these tips will help you elevate your networking skills and become the master of business-generating small talk.

Strategize

Trying to attend every networking event can quickly become exhausting and unproductive. Instead, take the time to consider which events best align with your goals for the firm. If there is a featured speaker, a little research may reveal the perfect conversation starter. If a guest list is available ahead of time, look through it to identify potential contacts. A little preparation can save you time and allow you to focus your energy on the most productive options.

Dressing the Part

A networking event is not the time to try out the latest innovations in fashion. Leave the shiny suit or glitter eye shadow at home. You want your new contacts to focus on what you have to offer, not what you chose to wear. A [Lexis Nexis](#) article advises attorneys to err on the side of caution with conservative clothing choices. With some exceptions, courtroom attire

is generally acceptable for legal networking events. But even if the event is a casual cookout or formal black tie, remember that you are representing your practice and your attire should always project a professional image.

Practice Makes Perfect

For many people, the art of schmoozing takes practice. Do you walk into the courtroom for a big case without some forethought about what you will say? Why not approach this task with the same type of preparation. Practice your introduction in the mirror until it feels natural to say. It also wouldn't hurt to come up with a few interesting facts to share about yourself and your firm should the opportunity arise.

Listen

Networking isn't all about talking. Make sure to utilize your listening skills as well. Ask new contacts questions and listen to their answers. Look for opportunities to connect and discuss how you can be of assistance to one another. You're a lawyer! Use your listening skills to pick up on valuable clues and act on them.

Follow Up

Networking is useless without follow up. A few days after the event, send an email or make a phone call to express your appreciation and invite future contact. Remember that less is more at this stage of the game. You don't want to become a pest or come off as desperate. Don't get discouraged if there isn't a timely response. It may just be a case of wrong timing. The important thing is not to give up. You never know what opportunities are out there if you don't take the initiative to find out.

About Erika Winston:

Erika Winston is a Virginia based writer with a passion for all things legal. As a former domestic relations attorney, she understands the challenge of determining the best fee structure for your practice. Erika is a regular contributor to [TimeSolv](#) and a variety of other publications.

