

## Networking Involves More Than Talking About the Law

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In my Summer 2010 YLC E-newsletter article I spoke about the importance of networking with non-lawyers in addition to lawyers. Similarly, it is helpful to talk about things other than the law when networking. Part of effective networking is staying at the top of someone's radar screen so that when something beneficial to your career comes up (job, business opportunity, speaking engagement, etc.) you are the first person that comes to mind.

In order to make a positive impression you will want to learn as many interesting things about the other person while conveying the same about yourself. Of course, most of the information you learn and share may be about the law (each of your expertise, major accomplishments, career related goals, etc.) but to build a lasting relationship, you will need to focus on the personal as well.

Great relationships are rarely built in one sitting. Rapport building is an investment of time and is one of the most powerful tools you have in your professional development tool box. Building rapport from scratch can be a daunting task. One of the greatest fears in the beginning of any relationship is the fear of the unknown. The quicker you can exchange information and establish more of a "known" factor, the quicker you can allay this fear.

Focusing on work is a good start but it will create a boundary. To bring in the personal (albeit appropriately) will bring more complete rapport. And let's face it, talking only about work whether it be the law or investment banking, is just plain boring and may not inspire someone to spend additional time with you. Do you remember the kid in school who only ever talked about homework and tests? Not fun.

I often recommend to clients to primarily network with people they enjoy being with. Time is limited so it's helpful to multi-task networking with something enjoyable so it doesn't feel like lost time altogether. For the non-law piece of networking you will want to focus on both connectors, what you have in common with the other person (or persons in a group situation), and "person-specific information", things you do not necessarily share but that are important to know about your colleague.

Connectors are important to rapport building in a numbers of ways:

**Likeability:** It is no surprise that we enjoy spending time with people we actually like and we tend to like people who are similar to us. Finding out what you share in common with someone can boost likeability.

**Food for talk:** Networking, especially with someone new, can be incredibly awkward. Sometimes you can run out of things to talk about. Quickly establishing a connector, gourmet cooking for example, can provide a whole new line of conversation.

**The people game:** Particularly when you can establish if you know people in common, you can up the learning curve about a person. For example, if you learn that someone you just met at a cocktail

reception went to high school with a friend of yours from college, you might be able to jump a few steps ahead in the conversation.

**First things first:** Non-work may be your entree to a person you want to network with. You might get introduced to a contact through a friend from the gym or possibly through your college roommate who grew up in Paris—so you may need to talk about wine, fine dining or fashion.

**Shared Experience:** Almost nothing bonds people more quickly than having gone through something similar. If you and your colleague are both new parents or are both single and dating in the city, you will be able to compare notes, give advice, share best practices, empathize and commiserate. You will not be wanting for conversation topics.

Person-specific information is equally important to effective relationship building:

**Ice Breakers:** In order to find out person-specific information, you need to have general conversation topics ready as a point of entry. Some of the quickest rapport I have ever seen built has started over topics as basic as the weather, current events (although unless you are really comfortable with someone--stay away from politics), food, music, fitness, and movies or TV shows. Everyone needs to eat and most people watch some form of TV or entertainment so these are good starting points. When you're traveling to a new city, for example, look up what's going on with the local sports teams and what the highlights might be--this is often the default conversation.

**Follow Up:** Especially early on in building a relationship with someone, follow up is critical to keep momentum going. When you reach out to set up another interaction, having something you learned about the person, what TV show they are addicted to for example, can help you add something that shows you have a genuine interest. It can even help you plan future outings. For example, I have a colleague who loves macaroni and cheese (as do I) so I make sure we go somewhere that serves it.

**Radar Networking:** Similar to follow-up, as your relationship with someone progresses, you will want to stay on his or her radar screen. A strategic way to do this "radar networking" is to reach out from time to time on topics of interest to that person. Did his/her favorite contestant on Dancing With The Stars win the Mirror Ball Trophy? Send a congratulatory email or a link with an interesting article about it.

**Networking Karma:** Often the most effective part of networking is when you can help someone else. When you are able to find out specific information about someone, you're in a better position to help them in the future. For example, if you know someone is thinking about refinancing a mortgage but is getting lost trying to navigate the process and you happen to know a mortgage broker, you can make the connection.

**Family Affair:** Anyone you talk to will have some permutation of a family that likely will be important to know about. With some exceptions, most people will want to talk about their families. Whether it is their spouse, a sick parent, siblings or children, their relationships with these people will be significant and an important piece of how they define themselves. In particular, people love to talk about their children. If you can remember names and make sure to ask about them, it will almost always have a positive impact on the other person. They will be touched and impressed that you remember. And, don't forget pets!

**Hobbies/Interests:** Interests are another great line of conversation. One of my colleagues curls (that Olympic sport that looks like you're pushing a really big hockey puck with a broom). I always ask her

about it and without fail it yields interesting discussion. I know we'll always circle back to talking about law firm management and professional development but it's nice to have something fun to talk about. The more positive things people remember about you, the more they will remember to remember you. Not that areas of the law can't be memorable but engaging people in the topics above will likely add even more interesting discussion and jumping points for rapport building.

Smart Networking Tip: Use the back of business cards or the "notes" field in outlook to record connector and person specific information to help you remember important facts about those with whom you are building rapport.



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