

**OFFICE OF CAREER &
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**THE *ART* OF
NETWORKING**

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INTRODUCTION

What do we mean by –Networking? Using known contacts to lead you to more contacts with the parallel goals of establishing valuable relationships, gaining insight into the job market, and ultimately securing a job. There are several ways to network including, attending career fairs, panel discussions and receptions. One important networking strategy involves setting up what are called –informational interviews. These are meetings where you conduct a 20 – 30 minute –interview of an individual to learn more about his/her specific job, solicit advice, and build a network of professional contacts. An informational interview is NOT a job interview and should not be used to ask for a job, but rather to learn more about a practice area or organization.

BASIC NETWORKING STEPS

1. IDENTIFY CONTACTS

Think of people in your already-established network of family, friends, and colleagues who have useful connections to other people in the legal market. One great resource to start with is the OCPD Mentor Program database which can be found on the main OCPD website. (Please also refer to the –My Network section of eCampus Recruiter which is currently being updated with new data). Also keep in mind other WCL students, professors (including adjunct professors who are often practicing attorneys), panelists and former supervisors and colleagues. Don't forget that parents, uncles and aunts, friends and neighbors can also be useful contacts.

Refer to Appendix for Sample Contact List.

2. MAKE CONTACT & SCHEDULE AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Decide whether you prefer to make a phone call or draft an email to your contact. Regardless of which format you choose, your content will be similar. You should begin by introducing yourself and mentioning how you received the individual's contact information (e.g., a mutual acquaintance, mentor database). Second, describe yourself briefly and highlight your relevant interests. Third, ask whether

the individual has some time available to further discuss his/her practice, give you advice on law school and/or the legal market (i.e., set up the informational interview). Two hard and fast rules: (1) do NOT attach your resume to an email request for an informational interview, and (2) do NOT ask your contact for a job during the initial informational interview request.

Refer to the Appendix for valuable samples of phone calls and emails.

3. PREPARE FOR YOUR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Preparation is an absolute must! As opposed to a job interview, in this situation *you* are responsible for providing content. You should thoroughly research both the individual you will be meeting with, as well as his/her place of employment. Use this research to aid in drafting specific and well-informed questions for the interview. Ask about the organization, practice areas, skills and background required, entry-level opportunities, career trajectory, etc.

Refer to the Appendix for sample informational interview questions and a sample checklist.

4. CONDUCT INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Dress professionally for your interview, similar to what you would wear to a job interview. Remember that you will be leading the interview and your goal is to not only gain helpful information about the job market, but to also make a solid impression as a confident and intelligent new attorney. Use your previously drafted questions to keep the conversation moving and solicit helpful information, but do not be afraid to also allow for spontaneous discussion. When wrapping up the interview, be certain to ask for referrals – i.e., ask for more contacts. You can also ask the individual to keep you in mind if he/she hears of any relevant openings. Do NOT offer your resume; however, do be prepared with copies of it in case it is solicited. Thank the individual sincerely for his/her time.

5. DEBRIEF & DOCUMENT

After the interview be sure to go over the conversation and write down any valuable information you were given. It is perfectly acceptable to take some notes during the interview, but be careful not to spend the whole interview writing down everything. You want to remain engaged and conversational, so only write down highlights – names and phone numbers. You can write down other important information once the interview is complete. Think about creating a database for yourself, either a chart, notebook, or spreadsheet where you can record your contacts, dates of interviews, thank you notes sent, and referrals. *Refer to Appendix for sample networking chart.*

6. SEND “THANK YOU” NOTE(S)

Send a thank you note to the contact formally thanking them for their time. Consider reminding them of the additional contact(s) they provided you, and your plans to follow through on those leads. *Refer to Appendix for sample thank you note.*

CAREER FAIRS / TABLE TALK

Career Fairs often boast events entitled –Table Talk which simply means that employers will send representatives from their organizations willing to answer questions and disseminate information about the organization. These events offer an excellent avenue for networking with employers as representatives are already prepared to answer your questions and engage in a discussion about their field of law.

Table Talk sessions allow you to ask questions that you would not want to ask in an interview situation: –What types of skills do you look for in a new hire? How many attorneys do you currently have on staff? What is the career path of an attorney in your field? What are case loads/ billables like for new attorneys?||

To make the most out of a Table Talk session it is again important to begin with a little preparation. Although employers will be willing to answer broad questions about their organizations, you will exponentially enhance your chances of making a favorable impression by asking a few *informed* questions: –I know that the largest program in your

organization deals with access to health care, but I saw that you also have a special education project. Could you tell me a little about that project? How many attorneys are involved? What are case-loads like?||

Remember to be enthusiastic, confident and professional at a Table Talk event. Always ask for a business card and remember to jot down relevant notes about the discussion soon after it occurs. You can bring copies of your resume to Table Talk events, but be wary of simply dropping off your resume at various employers. The point is to make a favorable impression with the employer and establish a contact. The smarter move would be to then draft a cover letter mentioning the individual you met at the career fair and mailing your cover letter and resume to the organization.

RECEPTIONS

When attending a reception, be sure to assess the audience and the purpose of the reception. For example, is the event an employer hosting a reception to attract law students, or a gathering of practitioners that have a common practice area? It is important to recognize the backdrop of the event and act accordingly. In addition, take a few minutes to brainstorm some topic areas and introductory comments prior to attending the event. This will make it easier for you to spark conversation with others and give you a fall back for awkward pauses. For example, –Did you enjoy the discussion? How long have you worked at the firm? I am interested in securities law, how did you first begin your career in that field? What was your first job after graduating from law school?||

Do not be overwhelmed by large gatherings – the purpose is not to meet every individual in the room but to focus on making a few meaningful connections. Set a goal to meet at least two new people, and try to stick to that goal. To that end, try to –break away from the pack|| if you are with friends. It is easier to approach others and to be approached when you are not already standing in a large group of people.

Remember to ask for business cards. If the person does not have one, ask if you can still follow up with them, and then make sure to do so! If you receive a card, be sure to write on the back of the card the date, where you met the individual and a note about your conversation or the person’s background as it relates to your job search. If you have a business card, you can certainly offer it, but don’t expect the contact to call you.

(Contact the Office of Student Services for details in obtaining WCL student business cards). Please refer to the Appendix for an excellent article on networking techniques to employ at receptions, –Work a Room Like a Pro,|| *The Washington Post*, January 7, 2007.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Panel discussions typically draw a specific type of practitioner(s) and/or people interested in learning more about a particular topic. Panelists are an ideal networking resource because they have a wealth of valuable information and expect to be approached by the audience. Do not forget that in addition to the speakers/panelists, the audience may be fertile ground for contacts, but you must be willing to ask! When attending a panel, use the time before or after the event to mingle with other audience members or with panelists. Be sure to take advantage of any materials provided to attendees; materials will sometimes give more in-depth information about panelists.

CHANCE ENCOUNTERS

You never know when you will meet someone who could help you in your career. Legal communities in some areas can be very small, and members of a specific bar or practice area may have close contact with others in their group. For these reasons, it is important that you always try to be a professional and pleasant person. A chance encounter could be the most valuable type of networking interaction you make.

FINAL WORDS OF ADVICE

Do not be afraid to network. As with many things in life, you will find the more you practice it, the easier this becomes. The skills you develop by networking will serve you time and again over the course of your professional career. Remember to follow up with contacts, and to the extent it is possible, try to keep your relationships current. Good luck!

APPENDIX

SAMPLE CONTACT LIST

Relatives and In-Laws	Law School Faculty & Staff	Undergrad & Grad School Faculty & Staff
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.
5.	5.	5.
Law School Alumni	Undergrad & Grad School Alumni	Supervisors, Past & Present
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.
5.	5.	5.
Friends (including Law and Undergrad Classmates)	People You Know Through Community Activities	Service Professionals (clergy, doctors, hairdressers, dentists, etc.)
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.
5.	5.	5.

Other contacts to consider:

NETWORKING EMAILS

SAMPLE 1.

Dear Mr. Prince:

I am a first year student at the Washington College of Law with practical and academic experience representing various immigrant communities in Southern California. In researching local agencies in Washington, DC that advocate on behalf of immigrant rights, I came across your name and was pleased to learn that you graduated from WCL.

I am determined to gain as much experience as possible during law school to further develop my understanding of immigration law and was hoping that you would be willing to meet with me to discuss your career, your organization's mission, and the types of academic and professional opportunities I should avail myself of, given my interests.

I appreciate your considering this request, and recognize that you are very busy. If I do not hear from you in the next few weeks, I will try contacting you by phone to inquire about your willingness and availability to meet.

Thank you in advance for your time. I look forward to speaking with you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Ira Mull

SAMPLE 2.

Dear Mrs. Smith:

I found your contact information from WCL's Mentor Database, and am very interested in speaking with you about your career at the EEOC. I am a third year law student at WCL and have spent my three years here interning for various government agencies. My goal is to work for the federal government upon graduation.

I would love to learn more about how you began working at the EEOC and what your current job entails. I am sure you have a busy schedule, but I would greatly appreciate any time that you could spare to meet with me. You can reach me at (202) 123-4567 or via this email address. Thank you in advance, and I hope to have the opportunity to meet with you soon.

Sincerely,

Joe Klein

SAMPLE 3.

Dear Mr. Muny:

As a third year student at American University Washington College of Law and the Editor of the *American University Administrative Law Review*, I am writing to express my sincere interest in your firm's administrative law practice and to inquire whether you would be receptive to meeting with me when I return home to Chicago this March during our Spring Break.

I recognize that your firm hires first year associates from the summer class, and I am not seeking a formal interview. Instead, I am hoping that you would be able to provide me with some advice and guidance as to how best to enter the Chicago legal market given my particular background, skills, and interests. I am particularly focused on learning more about opportunities with boutique firms and select city agencies.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. I hope to have the opportunity to meet with you at your convenience during the third week in March.

Sincerely,

Donatella Verona

NETWORKING PHONE CALLS

SAMPLE 1. THE ANATOMY

I. Introduction/ Mutual Acquaintance—Hi, my name is Jerome Walton. I met John Phillips at the DC Bar's recent CLE program on broker-dealer regulations, and he recommended [not *suggested*] I contact you. Is this a good time for you?||

II. Describe Yourself...Briefly—That's great. I don't want to take up a lot of your time, but I'm a second year law student at AU WCL and I am very interested in pursuing a career in securities law [both this summer, and when I graduate—*variable text...e.g., if you know they hire or are hiring...this is a bit outside of the realm of mere "information"*]; particularly in your practice specialty of representing broker-dealers and investment advisors.||

III. The ASK: - I was hoping that you would be amenable to setting aside some time for me to ask you more about your practice; perhaps solicit your advice about how best to position myself as a competitive candidate in the field; and also seek your guidance about some of the firms and agencies you feel might be good places for me to begin my career in securities law. Would you be willing to let me buy you a cup of coffee or otherwise meet to have such a conversation?||

-That's great; thanks! When would be most convenient for you?||

SAMPLE 2. THE VOICEMAIL

“Hello, my name is Gilda McGrooder and I’m a second-year law student at American University, Washington College of Law. I got your name from our Mentor Database, and I am calling because I’m very interested in child advocacy. I was hoping to set up a brief meeting with you to discuss your organization, your background, and any tips you might have for a law student interested in this field. My schedule is very flexible and I would be happy to accommodate whatever time works best for you. You can reach me at (202) 555-5555. That number again is (202) 555-5555. Thanks for your time and I hope to have the opportunity to meet with you personally.‖

THANK YOU NOTE

SAMPLE

Dear Mr. Bolinwad:

Thank you so much for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me. I greatly appreciated your advice on how to find a summer internship on Capitol Hill. At your suggestion, I phoned Michelle Bo and scheduled a meeting with her for next week.

I hope that you have a wonderful vacation to Italy. Thank you again for your help, and I will keep you posted on my job search progress.

Sincerely,

Paulette Schmiel

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

Be prepared with:

- Introduction/establish rapport
- State your purpose (clearly say you are not asking for a job)
- Your job status—why you are searching, leaving or left a position (be candid and concise)
- Your two-minute pitch (background, work history, responsibilities, skills, and accomplishments)

Your Career Goal _____

Your Target Organizations and Fields _____

Your Specific Questions (always have 3-5 open-ended questions to elicit information)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Obtain Names of New Network Contacts/Referrals _____

Thank them—for their time and interest and indicate the follow-up action you plan _____

SUGGESTED INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What are your primary job responsibilities?

How long have you worked here?

How did you find your current position (e.g., networking, job posting, internship)?

What is your own background and experience?

What is a typical work day like?

How much variety is there in your work day?

How much training/ supervision do/did you receive?

How much client contact do you have?

How much contact and what kinds of interactions do you have with individuals or groups outside the office or organization?

What do you like/dislike most about your work?

What are the toughest problems and decisions you handle?

What do you wish you had known about your position/the field before you started?

What type of professional and personal skills does it take to succeed at this type of work?

What books or journals would you recommend that I read?

Which professional associations should I join?

Do you recommend that I enroll in any particular law school classes? What would be a typical next career move for someone in your position? What recommendations do you have for me regarding a job search strategy?

Are there other people whom I should speak with regarding this practice area? May I tell them that you referred me to them?

Work a Room Like a Pro

Special to The Washington Post
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There's at least one at every business or social function. That person who seems to glide effortlessly through the room, shaking hands, kissing cheeks, swapping stories. They know everyone -- and everyone wants to know them. "If only I were so well-connected," you sigh to yourself as you stand alone by the bar.

Fortunately, you can be. While networking does take a certain level of suaveness, it can be learned. The key lies in cultivating relationships with people.

"Networking is about building trust," says Lynne Waymon, co-author of "Make Your Contacts Count" and co-owner of Contacts Count, a consulting firm in Silver Spring that teaches networking skills. "It's not something that's done in five seconds."

These tips will help you tackle your next cocktail party or work gathering with grace. Better yet, they're easy to follow. (First step: Move away from the wall. . . .)

Get the guest list in advance. When you RSVP to a business or social gathering, ask the host to send you a list of who will be attending, Waymon says. That way you can make a note before you arrive of the people with whom you'd like to connect.

"Plus, giving you the guest list works to the host's advantage as well," says Morris Reid, a District-based branding expert. "If great people are coming to their event, everyone will want to be there."

Master the introduction. One of the hardest parts of networking is starting a conversation with someone you don't know.

"My ace-in-the-hole question is, 'How do you know the host?,' " says Rob McGovern, founder of CareerBuilder.com and author of "Bring Your 'A' Game: The 10 Career Secrets of the High Achiever." Or if it's a business soiree, ask the person what brings him or her to the event.

Make eye contact and never look over the person's shoulder while you're speaking. "The worst is the people who size up the room while talking to you," says Felix Sanchez, a D.C. business owner who attends social or business events several times a week. "You'll inevitably be seen as a social climber, and people will never connect with you."

Keep it personal. "You have to find common ground and make a connection with the person," Reid says. Inquire about hobbies, or mention a recent vacation you've taken and ask if the person's ever been there.

Don't launch into a business discussion. "A cocktail party isn't the place to sell your project," McGovern says. And after a long day at the office, the person might not want to hear your ideas on how to combat global warming.

"There are times when I don't want to talk all business," says Ben Wu, Maryland Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr.'s assistant secretary for business and economic development. "But the person whom I've talked with about sports or where they went to school are the ones who've left an impression. I want to follow up with them."

Have a graceful exit strategy. We've all been there: You're in the middle of a conversation, but out of the corner of your eye, you spot someone you'd definitely like to talk to. You don't want to be rude, but . . .

"Try saying, 'Look, I don't want to tie you up. I know there's a lot of people here who want to talk to you, so we'll chat some other time,' " McGovern says. Reid suggests bringing someone else into the conversation and then easing your way on to the next group.

When it comes time to make introductions, don't worry if you can't remember the person's name. "I just ask them to repeat it," says Isabel Maples, a dietitian and trade group spokeswoman in Reston. "It shows people that you care what their name is. And sometimes it opens the door, because they don't remember who I am either."

Break out the business card -- but only if you have reason to. A lot of business cards end up in the garbage, Waymon says.

"You should only give someone your card if you feel some sort of chemistry with the person, or if you've promised to send them something or invite them somewhere," Waymon says. "Look for a reason to stay in touch."

Also, unless it's a job fair, leave your r?sum? at home. "It's the biggest turnoff," Reid says. "And it makes you look desperate."

Indulge in a glass of wine, but leave the cheese. Yes, the hors d'oeuvres may look tasty, but no one wants to shake hands with the guy licking barbecue sauce off his fingers. "And you're always holding a greasy napkin or risk having food in your teeth," says Marisa Nightingale, media director for the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

As for imbibing, Reid recommends limiting the alcoholic beverages to two and drinking plenty of water. "You never want to be the person known as the fun drunk," he says.

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