

# Solidifying Relationships with Old-Fashioned Networking

**S**ocial networking should be a very important part of nearly every lawyer's marketing and business development plan. I am a big fan (and user) of social media forums, including LinkedIn and Twitter, and find that the opportunities to connect with people are amazing and boundless.

Still, in a world where technology and virtual relationships are becoming the norm, the value of personal contact is increasing exponentially. Sure, social media provides abundant opportunities for creating connections and making personal contact (e.g., emails), but I also know that clients generally want to work with people they like, know and trust. It is more difficult to build this kind of relationship through technology.

So, in an issue of *Law Practice* magazine filled with advice on utilizing social media, this article is going back to the basics of personal networking.

## TAKING RELATIONSHIPS TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Here are just a few thoughts on the value of old-fashioned networking techniques:

### 1 Attend events

When lawyers have trouble developing a book of business, it is often because they haven't developed a large enough network. You need a certain critical mass of contacts in order to produce a reliable stream of clients or referrals. So what is the best way to meet new people? Get out of your office. Attend conferences, professional meetings and networking events. Play in a golf league, join a book club or volunteer for a board. The objective is to look for places, events and activities in which you have a genuine interest, and where you know that the kind of people you would like to meet and build a relationship with gather. When attending events, don't worry about what you will say; instead, think about

what you will ask. Prepare some questions in advance that you can pose to attendees generally or to specific people who you know will be there.

### 2 Visit people

I cannot begin to count the number of times lawyers have confided to me that they have a significant client they have never met face to face. Contrast that situation with this client comment: "It's very easy to fire people you don't know." Have an out-of-town client? Go visit. Get valuable business from an out-of-state referral source? Go visit. While you're there, take a tour, learn about the business, meet other people in the company, and ask good questions about the industry or entity. Depending on the nature of the relationship, you could turn this visit into a social event, such as dinner, or keep it on a business plane by reviewing a file, providing a status report or conducting a case post mortem.

### 3 Celebrate with clients

What better time to interact with clients than when something turned out well? Yet, again, so many good intentions get sidetracked. You can celebrate work you've done with clients, like throwing a closing party for a thorny deal or a successful union negotiation. You can celebrate clients' special occasions, such as an anniversary of the business, a promotion a client receives or a client's new office building. Or you can just arrange a special gathering to celebrate the relationship with an appreciation party, baseball game or cruise on a river.



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## 4 Send personal, handwritten notes

The U.S. Postal Service released a study recently that said the average household receives a piece of personal mail approximately once every seven weeks. Can you imagine the power of a handwritten envelope in that dearth of mail? There are unlimited opportunities to send notes. Thank-you notes can be used to recognize referral sources and loyal clients, of course, but also to express appreciation to prospects who give you information, people who invite you to serve on boards, moderators of panels to which you were invited, editors of publications that published your articles and members of the media who seek you out as a source. There are also many happy occasions to use handwritten notes, both on a professional level, for things such as a promotion, coverage in the business section or a new product launch, and on a personal level, such as a birthday, a new baby or recognition for an outside activity.

## 5 Facilitate introductions

The goal of having a large network is to add value to your relationships and your practice. Instead of thinking in a linear fashion, where you have one-on-one relationships with a number of different people, think of it as a circle and you are at the center. How can you link various people who know you in order to help them? You may have a client looking for a new accountant, distributor or CFO. By



putting the client in touch with someone else in your network who might fill the bill, you are help-

ing two people. Further, you can think about larger groups or gatherings that may be helpful or of value. For example, you could create a roundtable of clients who will benefit from talking to each other or bring them all together to support an organization or cause. If you start to use your network this way, you will be perceived as a connected and invaluable resource.

## CONCLUSION

In my experience, social networking can help extend your network. I have met new “friends” through LinkedIn and Twitter, many of whom I have never met in person. I have called upon someone in my social network to give a presentation to a client, and I have reached out to others for advice or information.

Still, even Twitter promotes “tweetups,” where people have a chance to meet face to face. Old-fashioned networking activities will neither replace social networking nor be replaced by it. The two should work hand in hand to help you build strong, long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationships. LP

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