



## **Networking Not Working? 5 Common Mistakes New Attorneys Make and How to Fix Them**

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Network, network, network!" Many of us are familiar with the importance of networking, particularly when searching for a job. Although there is little dispute networking is a vital aspect of the legal field- or any professional field - many newer attorneys feel uncomfortable when attending events specifically organized for the purpose of networking. Much of this discomfort can be reduced by simply framing what it means to "network" in a different way. Below are a few of the biggest networking mistakes new lawyers often make and how to avoid them in the future and make the networking aspect of your career more valuable.

### **1. Failing to keep in touch with one's growing network**

Picture this: you attend an event, meet a few people, hand out a few business cards, and go home. You completed the task and networked, right? Wrong. Networking does not start and end with attending and leaving an event. Making the initial acquaintance with a fellow professional is only the beginning. What makes the networking process meaningful and valuable (and enjoyable) is maintaining relationships with your existing network and building off of them. Not only that, if you are one of the many who feels uncomfortable going into a situation not knowing anyone, future events will be far less daunting since you will have kept up your existing relationships. Portland is a small community; you will inevitably see people you have met before. Take advantage of this by keeping in touch with the people you meet and the benefits will follow.

### **2. Expecting immediate results**

Patience is a virtue when it comes to networking. During one's job search especially, it may be discouraging not to reap benefits immediately as a result of networking, but building relationships takes time. Introducing yourself and having a pleasant initial conversation is just the tip of the iceberg, and it is important to not give off the impression you are only attending an event to meet people who can do something for you. Take the time to form valuable relationships - invite people to lunch, coffee or happy hour, send thank you notes, or ask your new contacts if they are willing to host an informational interview - and the results will follow naturally.

### **3. Lacking authenticity and/or feigning interest**

It can be easy to fall into a pattern of asking and answering the same questions of every person at networking events without taking into consideration what the other person is actually offering or saying to you. Avoid "going through the motions." Odds are, even if you are only interacting with attorneys at local networking events, every person you meet has a different story and different pathway, and it is very likely you will have something unique in common with different people. Maybe both of you are employment law attorneys, Blazers fans, or wine connoisseurs. We have all been in a position where the person we are talking to either lacks interest in what we are saying or is clearly only saying what they think they are "supposed to" say in a certain environment. At the end of the day, our fellow attorneys are human and are interested in forming honest relationships and friendships built on a foundation of common ground.

### **4. Getting too personal or not being personal enough**

There is a fine balance between asking too many personal questions or sharing too much personal information and not being genuine. Remember that what makes you "you" is not only your job. Make yourself memorable by giving the person you are meeting an idea of who you are outside of your job by discussing your hobbies and outside interests. At the same time,



when getting to know them, do not be too invasive. Asking whether someone is single or married might give off the wrong idea. Mastering professionalism while remembering you are a person with interests beyond your job is vital.

#### **5. Waiting until the job search**

Networking should not be viewed as something only to be used when you need the benefits immediately. By now it is clear the mantra of this article is that networking is about building relationships. A relationship takes time. Waiting to connect with your professional community until you are searching for a job or new opportunities is likely to lead to frustration and disappointment. Too many recent law school graduates and mid-level associates seeking new opportunities attend events with the idea they will meet the one person they need to meet who will lead them to success and happiness. On the contrary, the people who actually make the most of networking by building meaningful relationships early on are the ones who are more likely to see an increased pool of opportunity when their job search begins.

Above all, be yourself and enjoy the process. With the right mindset and skills, networking can be one of the most useful, worthwhile, and rewarding aspects of an attorney's career.