

Maximizing Your Employability Through Involvement in the Legal Community

By Harrison Barnes from Los Angeles Office Managing Director

Summary: In today's competitive legal job market, attorneys must actively cultivate their professional networks and stay involved in their local legal communities to increase their employability. Taking part in activities such as speaking at legal conferences, joining pro bono initiatives, writing for legal publications, and serving on bar association committees are invaluable for demonstrating an attorney's interest in their profession and career development. These activities also provide the opportunity to connect with other attorneys and potential employers, build an impressive resume, and increase knowledge of the legal field.

Attorneys may also need to invest in professional development activities such as continuing legal education courses and seminars to obtain the necessary credentials to stand out from the competition. These activities help attorneys stay up to date on current legal issues while also providing important networking opportunities. In addition, honorary memberships in associations such as the American Bar Association (ABA) demonstrate an attorney's commitment to the legal profession, and the leadership opportunities that come with such memberships can be used to show off an attorney's organizational and communication skills.

Attorneys should also consider joining legal associations, such as the National Association of Women Lawyers (NAWL), in order to network with other attorneys, gain legal expertise and skills, and increase the chances of being hired by a desirable employer. Furthermore, volunteer work through legal aid organizations can demonstrate to potential employers an attorney's commitment to helping individuals in need, while also illustrating the attorney's ability to be compassionate and understanding.

Finally, attorneys should take advantage of social media outlets such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook to not only market themselves to potential employers but also to engage with the legal community. This can be done by making professional posts, speaking at events, joining industry groups, and sharing relevant news stories. By utilizing these platforms, attorneys can increase their visibility in the legal industry while also connecting with other established professionals.

By staying involved in the legal community through speaking engagements, writing, volunteer work, and social media, attorneys can demonstrate their commitment to the profession, build valuable connections, and increase their employability. These activities provide opportunities for an attorney to develop their professional skills, build an impressive resume, and set themselves apart from the competition.

Your work may seem to be isolating, but the future of your [legal career](#) can sometimes depend on how well you get your name out in the legal community.

What is Involvement in the Legal Community?

Involvement in the legal community includes activities such as bar membership, participation in bar activities, volunteering with legal service organizations, attending or serving on boards or committees of legal organization, taking on leadership roles with legal organizations, and participating in continuing legal education. These activities help you stay abreast of the latest developments in law and establish relationships with legal professionals.

Why Involvement in the Legal Community?

A lawyer who is involved in the legal community is more likely to gain recognition within their field and develop a network of contacts. Such involvement provides a means for attorneys to market their services and

expand their professional reach. Furthermore, being involved in legal activities is a great way to stay connected with the latest legal developments and the community of legal professionals. As a result, involvement in the legal community can positively impact a lawyer's employability and their ability to find and retain employment in the legal profession.

How Does Involvement in the Legal Community Benefit a Lawyer?

Involvement in the legal community helps build a lawyer's professional profile and it demonstrates active engagement in legal circles and professional respect. Such participation in legal activities builds a lawyer's credibility and expertise in their field. Additionally, taking part in such activities can help lawyers gain an edge in the job market by providing them with opportunities to network, find employment, and interact with those in the legal industry.

What Are the Benefits of Involvement in the Legal Community?

Being involved in the legal community provides many benefits to lawyers. Not only does involvement benefit the legal profession by increasing the awareness of legal issues and providing new perspectives to legal matters, but it also helps lawyers to develop their own skills and knowledge and build their professional profile. Additionally, involvement in the legal community can open up opportunities for involvement in leadership roles, volunteering, and continuing legal education, which can ultimately lead to greater employability.

The Impact of Involvement in the Legal Community

Involvement in the legal community has a direct impact on a lawyer's employability and professional standing in the legal profession. By engaging in activities such as bar membership, bar activities, volunteering, board and committee work, and continuing legal education, lawyers can cultivate relationships within the legal community and build their networks. Such involvement also helps build a lawyer's credibility and expertise, thereby increasing their chances of obtaining and maintaining employment in the legal industry.

For many attorneys, especially those in [large law firms](#), life as an attorney can seem pretty solitary. There are, of course, the subtle and entertaining email exchanges with your peers, as well as meetings with other attorneys and clients. There is the occasional CLE event, firm retreat, or maybe even a firm social event here and there. Nevertheless, many attorneys rarely venture too far out of the office and into the legal community. [Time away from work is "family" or "recreation time"](#)-something to be cherished and certainly not time you would want to spend with other lawyers.

Read related article:

[Why Attorneys Need to Get Out of the Office and Get Involved in the Legal Community](#)

[How Important Are Intelligence, Work Ethic, Perseverance, and Social Intelligence to Succeeding in Large Law Firms?](#)

[How to Use Social Networking, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter in Your Job Search](#)

I have been studying [successful lawyers](#) for more years than I care to count. The most successful attorneys are also generally the most visible. This is not always the case, but it usually is. Moreover, [when an attorney is attempting a lateral move](#), being involved in the legal community is something that can help them a great deal. In numerous placements I have made-and in the majority of the largest and most significant ones-it was the attorney's involvement in the legal community that was the "clincher" that got them the job.

Read also: [What Happens When You Work with a BCG Attorney Search Legal Placement Professional?](#)

This article discusses the importance of getting out in the legal community to [your legal career](#) and, ultimately, to getting a job. While there are several benefits to being visible, the most important of these are: (1) if you are visible, you will be in people's spotlight, (2) if you are visible, you will learn more, and (3) if you

are visible, you will have a better chance of [getting a job and being employable](#).

1.If You Are Visible, You Will Be In People's Spotlight

It would be difficult to think of any politician, even the proverbial class president, who was able to rise to the top without [networking with a lot of people](#) and being involved in the community. The class presidents you have known probably attended all the football games and cheered, even if they hated football. The traditional politician goes out and gives speeches. The traditional politician may even write books and articles. Most of these articles and books are all the same, something about the "[need for change](#)". None of this is an accident, in order to capture the public's attention, politicians, like successful lawyers, must get into the spotlight.

If you were unjustly [accused of a crime](#) and needed a [criminal attorney](#)-a really good criminal attorney-my sense is that one of a few names would come to mind. I am assuming Barry Scheck, F. Lee Bailey, Johnny Cochran and others might be among these names. Regardless of whether or not these are good attorneys, their unique knack for self promotion and the ability to harness the power of the press has put these names at the tip of your tongue and in your personal spotlight.

The fact is that there are names like this in every major **legal market** in the United States. This is true whether or not you are talking about mezzanine financing, workers' compensation litigation, [personal injury](#) or corporate bond issues. In all cases, the attorneys who get ahead-in a major way-manage to put themselves in the legal spotlight. If they did not have this talent, they would not be as successful as they are.

I am assuming a lot of this conversation sounds quite familiar. Yes, this is the same rationale for "branding" that corporations follow all day long. Branding makes sense. If you have ever wondered why a brand might pay \$50,000 to have a two page ad inside a magazine with a couple of attractive models and nothing more the answer, of course, is branding. Here, as with all branding exercises, the company will be attempting to get your attention so you associate their brand with *something*.

The main reason to be [visible in the legal community](#) is so that you can be in the spotlight of others both inside and outside the legal community. If you are visible, people will see you. If they see you, they will associate you with whatever you are doing to be visible. If you are making a speech about an area of law, they will associate you with this area of law. Even if you are not regularly speaking, but just attending events about a given topic regularly, they will associate you with this area of law, as well. In order to [succeed at the practice of law](#), people need to know who you are.

See related article:

[You Need to Be Seen as an Authority](#)

[The One Simple Rule You Must Understand for Succeeding in a Law Firm: Ignore this Rule at Your Own Peril](#)

Rising above the hundreds, thousands, or tens of thousands of similar attorneys in your legal market is no easy task. Most of the activities that attorneys are involved in are quite solitary and involve their firm, their firm's clients and perhaps judges if [you are a litigator](#) (who goes to court). All of these people may know who you are, but there are literally thousands of other people who need to know who you are.

Read more: [Do Not Ever Be Afraid to Broadcast Your Value](#)

When you read your local legal newspaper, there are undoubtedly numerous articles referencing attorneys in your community. Judges, lawyer politicians and others also need to catch the attention of outside people in order to get where they are. Moreover, major rainmakers must also do the same. By being visible in the legal community, you open yourself up to a whole host of potentialities that would not exist without you being

visible. In order to be visible, you must take action.

There are several ways attorneys take action to become visible in the legal community. If you write an article about a legal topic and it is seen by numerous people, this will likely generate referrals for you because people will think you are an expert on the given topic. The same goes for speeches and attending events of legal significance. The more visible you are, the more likely it is that reporters in the legal community will know who you are as well. You need to publicize yourself. If you are unknown in the legal community, you will certainly not be able to benefit from everything the world can offer you when you are known.

If you are practicing in a law firm, the chances are that you regularly hear that such and such an attorney from your law firm has gone and made a speech about some patently obvious topic from time to time. Some examples immediately come to mind that I have heard in the past:

"Real Estate - Will the Market Improve?"

"Discovery In Litigation - Tactics for Improvement"

"Expert Witnesses - Techniques for Preparing Them for Maximum Effectiveness"

"Employment Law - How to Protect Against FMLA Violations"

All of these are noble topics. Most of these topics, however, are pretty obvious to most experienced practitioners. Nevertheless, [law firms will trumpet out their clients](#), prospective clients and others to these presentations. This is not to say that these are not noble topics and the attorneys who attend them will not learn anything-they will, but the substantive content of most of these events is pretty weak. Given this fact, there must be another purpose to these sorts of events. There is.

Following (or prior to) one of these events, a well-managed law firm will generally issue a press release and email the attorneys in their firm about the speech or event. The point of all this activity is to generate a "buzz" that the law firm and the attorney(s) making the given presentation are experts in one area of the law or other. This will be reinforced in the attorneys inside the presenter's firm, as well as the attorneys who ultimately hear the presentation.

The value of this is that an individual or the firm is being put in the spotlight. A strong percentage of [rainmakers in law firms](#) manage to consistently get into the spotlight in various methods. They often do so by making speeches or writing articles about the banal and obvious. Regardless of how this is done, it is crucial for an attorney to be in the spotlight in order to advance.

See also: [The Benefits Of Practicing Law](#)

2. If You Are Visible, You Will Learn More

If you are visible, you will be in a position to learn. The image at the beginning of this article - of the solitary attorney working alone inside an office - is all too common. By getting out in the legal community, you will be exposed to others, knowledge about what others are doing, [the status of different ideas](#), who is who and more. By learning all of this information, you will put yourself in a position to even further distinguish yourself, because you can recalibrate and adjust to this information to become more effective.

Insulated inside a law firm, you are learning from the attorneys you are working with and the clients you are working with. Certainly, you may read legal periodicals, but there is really no substitute for direct knowledge from others. All of this is more concrete and far more likely to be advantageous to you. In addition, you are likely to get more "nuances" of various information as well as "off the record" information about the legal community. The [advantages of learning more through networking](#) cannot be understated.

See Also:

[How to Network](#)

[Long-lasting Networking Techniques](#)

Networking: Are You Afraid To Ask For Help?

Why Networking Is Essential to Your Success as an Attorney

Polishing Up Your Legal Networking Skills

While [learning through networking](#) is somewhat of a personal calculus vis--vis what it is to you, I believe that one of the more important aspects of this is that it gives you a better appreciation of what you are doing. For example, if you know the [network of attorneys](#) in your practice area in your city you have a better sense of what you need to do to compete to get clients. If you know more about your practice area, you can improve your work. If you bring all of this together, you can have a [better appreciation for the practice of law](#) and become a more complete attorney.

Read related:

[How Attorneys Can Network: Why Networking is Essential to Attorney Success](#)
[The Importance of Job Networking](#)
[Networking Essentials](#)

The fact is that you need to get involved with the legal community and other attorneys in order to make this happen. You will learn more if you are involved in the legal community and this will help your career.

Read also: [Lessons of Stars: How to Be a Star in Your Life and Career](#)

3. If You Are Visible, You Will Have a Better Chance of Getting a Job

I want to be clear about one thing: It is not easy to get a job as an attorney. If you have been practicing for more than 5 or 6 years, it is even more difficult to get a job. If you have been practicing more than 10 years and do not have any major business, it can be extremely difficult to get a job. While my recruiting efforts are focused on law firms, my rationale applies equally to other types of legal employers you may be interested in. Moreover, the more prestigious the employer, the more difficulties you will have getting a job with them. Some law firms are so exclusive that they have virtually never hired laterally throughout their entire history.

Read related: [Which Type of Law Firm Is Best for You and Your Career: Main Offices of Large National Firms, Branch Offices of Large National Firms, Midsized Firms, Boutiques, or Newer Fast-Growing Firms?](#)

One of the hallmarks of a law firm is that it is somewhat like a 15th century guild. Law firms, in particular, are extremely suspicious of outsiders and attorneys that are not part of their firm. When I am placing attorneys laterally, for example, it is quite rare for an attorney to move from a less prestigious to a more prestigious firm. This does happen-and given vagaries of practice area demands, the state of the market and other factors-it might even happen a lot during certain times. Nevertheless, as a general rule, it does not happen that often.

See related: [How Much Do Hot Legal Practice Areas Vary from State to State?](#)

When a group of lawyers are deciding whether or not to hire you, or even bring you in for interviews, they are going to be suspicious as a general rule. Guilds being what they are, attorneys are going to be suspicious of anyone who is switching jobs. They will be even more suspicious if they do not know you, or know of you. If they know you and do not like you, then you are toast, of course. If they know you (or of you) and have a generally good impression of you, they are going to be much more likely to want to speak with you. Some sort of "prior group acceptance" really goes a long way. Here are some short examples of conversations I have had with hiring partners over the years:

"The people who interviewed him were all unsure, but Nancy from accounting noticed him in the hall and said that she remembered him from a public speaking course and thinks he is a good guy." (third year lawyer)

"We really could get by without someone like him at his level, but one of our clients has spent some time with him at a couple of law school alumni events and everyone really liked him." (fourth year partner with no business)

"Although he is a litigation candidate, Jim from our tax department said that people in the local bar association like him a great deal." (fourth year lawyer)

I could go on and on with similar stories. Nevertheless, the point is that when you connect with people outside of your own sphere of influence, this will help you. The familiar is always more comfortable than the unfamiliar. If you become familiar to others in the legal community, you will have a better chance of getting a job if you ever need one.

While I have not even touched upon this, and you would think I would, another [real benefit of all this involvement in the legal community is that it can lead to a job](#). When you walk around most law firms, I would estimate that as many as 20% of the attorneys at many law firms are there because they knew someone. They knew someone from some sort of involvement in the legal community.

How do you think hiring decisions are made in most law firms and other legal organizations? One of the first things that happens is the law firm has to identify a need. If the law firm identifies a need, the chances are very good that they made this determination because a partner somewhere in the firm-or a client-was throwing off work that could not be adequately serviced with the existing personnel inside the law firm. Once this need is met, before an ad goes up in the paper, a job board, or on the firm website, the partner will generally ask themselves: "Do I know anyone?" This will occur even prior to a recruiter (such as myself) getting involved in the search.

What happens a large percentage of the time (especially at [smaller and midsized firms](#)) is that *the partner does know someone*. The person he knows may not necessarily be the most qualified for the position, and may not even represent the massive universe of possible candidates for the position. What the partner will know is that (1) he knows the person and (2) based on their previous contact with the person, he feels comfortable with the person. An instant seal of approval. A call may go out, an informal chat may occur. Whatever happens, the results that occur and potential hire may occur because someone was "in the spotlight" and in the partner's radar. That is, someone was in the partner's radar who does not even work at the firm.

See also: [How Important Is It for Attorneys to Work at a Major Law Firm?](#)
Conclusions

As a recruiter, I can tell you that the most sought after attorneys are the most visible. Becoming visible can get you clients. Becoming visible can help you learn more and become a better attorney. Becoming visible can also make you much more employable than you would be if you choose not to be visible.

In terms of employability, visibility is important because it gives others a "comfort level" with you as a brand. [No matter how large or small the legal market you are practicing in](#), you are a brand. In almost all cases, employers-like consumers-choose the more familiar over the less familiar brand. Become a familiar brand.

See related articles for more details:

[Do Not Be Immobilized in Your Job Search](#)

[Expose Yourself to Pain in Your Job Search](#)

[What can you do with your law degree and practice experience besides practicing law?](#)

[Twelve Sexy Things You Can Do with a Law Degree That \(1\) May Make You Famous and \(2\) Do Not Require Practicing Law](#)

[60 Nontraditional Jobs You Can Do with a Law Degree \(and Should Strongly Consider Doing\)](#)

[How Much Do Hot Legal Practice Areas Vary from State to State?](#)

Seven Things the Best Legal Recruiters Do that You Cannot Do Yourself