

# Why Networking Is Essential to Your Success as an Attorney

By Harrison Barnes from Los Angeles Office Managing Director

## Why Networking is Essential to Your Success as an Attorney

One thing that many attorneys do not know is that the most successful attorneys are networked. Attorneys who do not network often fail over time because of this fact alone.

By networked, I mean these attorneys have developed a very large circle of people with whom they can (1) access information they would not otherwise have and (2) make themselves known to a pool of people to whom they otherwise would not be known. Having access to information about jobs, developments within your firm, happenings in the legal market, clients with business they can give you and your firm, and more is essential to your success as an attorney. Moreover, being known to sources of information relevant to your career is even more important. What others outside your immediate circle of influence know is arguably just as important as what people inside your immediate circle of influence know.

This article examines the importance of networking to your legal career. First, this article discusses the value of networking in *finding* a job inside a law firm; second, it discusses the importance of networking to *keeping* a job inside a law firm; and, third, it discusses why the failure to network *can be fatal* to your career.

As this article will demonstrate, few things are as important to your legal career as the ability to effectively network.

### The Importance of Networking in Finding a Job Inside a Law Firm

#### Most people learn about jobs from people other than their close friends

Studies have shown that most people find out about their jobs through other people. In the late 1960s, a graduate student at Harvard, Mark Granovetter did a study of how people find out about their jobs. Granovetter subsequently published a book on this and other findings in the mid-1990s that offers many important findings about how people learn about their jobs.

(Granovetter, Mark. [Getting a Job: A Study of Contacts and Careers](#). 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.)

Granovetter interviewed numerous people and asked them to identify the five people they spent the most time with and draw a diagram as to how those people were connected with each other. At the time, it was a well-known fact that most people learn about jobs through other people rather than through advertising. Accordingly, Granovetter also asked the individuals he interviewed to identify the person who referred them to their last job.

The interesting part about this study was that the person who was identified was never one of the five close friends. When Granovetter asked them to tell him about the person who did refer them to the job, the people almost always responded that the person was an "acquaintance" and not a friend. Granovetter interviewed 282 technical, managerial, and professional workers for his study and found that of the 56% of the people who found their jobs through personal contacts, only 17% learned about their last positions from close friends.

The lesson behind Granovetter's findings seems to be that most people learn about jobs through people who

are outside of their immediate networks. People whom you are closest to are likely to have access to the same information you do. Conversely, people outside of your close group are likely to be exposed to information you are not exposed to. Therefore, if you want to learn about a job, it is important that you have access to people outside of your existing network of close friends. There is no reason to suspect this logic would not apply to attorneys, either. In fact, in my experience, the logic is even more apropos: I would estimate that less than 5% of all attorneys get positions through people inside their immediate circle of influence.

One of the most interesting things I ever heard when I was practicing law was when an individual who is considered one of the more successful attorneys in America said to me and a group of other first-year associates: "One of the biggest mistakes of my life was not making more friends and getting closer with people in law school." At the time, this statement amazed me because I saw this individual as someone quite remarkable in his own right. I did not understand what the person was talking about because in my eyes, I had a hard time believing the person could be even more successful. What I did not understand at the time was that this attorney believed that if he had properly networked, even at that early stage, he could have been far, far more successful than he was.

Regardless of how well you networked in law school, when you commence the practice of law and throughout your career, networking is something that is profoundly important to your present or future job search. Networking beyond your immediate social ties is something that is necessary for you to be successful when and if you are ever seeking a position.

In large law firms, the emphasis on billable hours, the meticulousness of the work, and the stress and demands of the practice of law will often undermine the importance of networking. Many attorneys may feel that once they have joined a large law firm, their number-one task is to do the absolute best work they are capable of, and, if they do that and nothing more, they will be successful. This could not be further from the truth. While most young attorneys are ignorant of this fact, the odds are overwhelmingly strong that they will not be at the firms they joined out of law school for more than 2 or 3 years. If the next firm they join is a large firm as well, the odds are also very good that they will not be there more than 2-3 years, either.

If a young attorney goes to a large law firm and closes the door or puts on blinders and works as hard as he or she can, he or she is making a mistake if he or she is not networking as well. There is a fallacy in thinking that if you just work as hard as you can and exclude external stimuli you will have long-term success. When an associate looks around him or her and sees groups of partners and imagines the success these individuals are experiencing, he or she often does not grasp what it was that made these partners successful. In most cases, it was networking.

It goes without saying that you need to be good at your job. However, the work you are doing inside a law firm has to come from somewhere. Work almost always comes from partners who have managed to make contacts somewhere outside the law firm. These partners have gotten involved in the community and met people outside of their immediate group of attorneys and these people have (1) given them business, or (2) spread the word about the attorney and their good work. This networking is why most attorneys have jobs to begin with.

Your ability to get a [legal job](#) through networking is a subtle thing. You need to have a large circle of people with whom you associate both inside and outside of the law. I also believe that you are far more likely to get a position from someone outside the immediate group of lawyers you know inside your law firm than lawyers you may know well at your own firm or as close friends. If you know a few people and stay close to them, you are likely to only benefit from the information they have, and you will almost always know what this information is. If you know numerous people as "acquaintances" outside this immediate sphere, you will be exposed to a great deal more information. The number may be 10 or 20 times as much information.

## The most successful attorneys are frequently the most networked

As a recruiter, part of my job is to make telephone calls and speak with attorneys about [job openings](#). When I recruit, I have often noticed that the best attorneys are the ones who are often the most open to speaking with me. In fact, when I first started recruiting successful partners several years ago, I was surprised how friendly they were. They were many times friendlier than young associates. Back then I wondered why this was. As I will explain below, I now know why this was the case.

One source of leads that a good legal recruiter will use for their legal recruiting efforts are lists which are published by various publications, such as "The Top 40 Lawyers Under 40 in California" or "America's Top Trial Lawyers," for example. When I telephone lawyers from these lists, while they are almost always very happy with their current positions and unlikely to move, they are universally very open to speaking with me and very interested in any information I can offer about the job market and what is going on with it. These attorneys will ask me to send them my card, take the time to speak with me, and almost always remember me if I see them at one event or another in the future. There are several reasons I believe this is true.

First and foremost, I believe that these attorneys who get on these various lists do so because they are good at networking in the first place. However they do it, they are able to get the attention of individuals in the media and other attorneys in their firm and at other firms, since members of the public nominate them for such lists. The ability of these attorneys to get themselves media acknowledgment is meaningful because many attorneys who are much better attorneys are not even singled out like this because no one knows about them. Whenever I read such lists, knowing what I do about the legal market, I am almost always intrigued because I know full well that there are many attorneys that are not on these lists that are much better attorneys than the attorneys that are mentioned on these lists. The reason they are not on the lists and the other attorneys are on these lists is because the one group of attorneys is "networked" and the other is not.

In my conversations with the attorneys on these lists, the reason they take my phone calls and speak with me as long as they do is that they as individuals highly value setting up networks. My telephone call, while it would be annoying to less savvy attorneys, is welcomed by net-workers who will put down their work to network and learn some information from me. More importantly, when you look back on the Granovetter study, a very good explanation for the reason these attorneys take my calls so seriously is due to the fact that *they value networks beyond their immediate spheres of influence*. When you look at how most individuals learn about jobs, they are learning about them through networks outside their immediate spheres of influence.

### How to network yourself into an attorney job

There are several ways you can network to find an [attorney job](#). I have listed most of these below.

At the outset, though, I would like to mention that I have known numerous attorneys who have networked extensively and not found a job. When I hear this, I often sit down with these attorneys, and it becomes immediately evident to me why they have not located positions through networking. The answer is a very basic psychological one: these attorneys did not want a job. For me, such attorneys are easy to spot because they lack the sort of enthusiasm, engagement, and interest of someone who is going after something they want. Simply going to events and meeting all sorts of people will not help you if you really do not want a job. If you really want a job, your enthusiasm will come through when you are networking with people, and your enthusiasm will be contagious.

First, you need to understand that with networking everything counts. How you act in the legal community and among friends, what you say and what you do--it all counts. There are plenty of people who have done things wrong as law students or as attorneys and believe this does not matter. Everything counts. When you

develop a good reputation for yourself, help others, work hard, are honest, and even volunteer to attend events that seem meaningless, it counts.

The reason I am so adamant about everything counting is due to the fact that most of what you do and have done is known by someone. When you become a topic of conversation or if someone is interested in passing along your name to someone looking for an attorney, there will typically be a general opinion expressed about you. You want that opinion to be positive, and you want people to think you are the sort of person to be recommended. Accordingly, my first recommendation is that everything you do counts in the final calculus of how networking can help you.

Second, it is extremely important to make yourself known to lots of people. The reason that companies (and often people) hire advertising agencies, public relations firms, and so forth is that they want to make themselves known to large audiences of people and, more importantly, get the attention of these people. Attorneys use recruiters because recruiters have the ability to make you known to large groups of people and get their attention. A product cannot sell unless it is known to large groups of people. This should be self-evident, but you need to take a moment to think about it. If people do not know who you are, how can you get a job?

It is a well-known fact in the legal community that certain types of attorneys are easier to place than others. One reason for the use of recruiters is that many groups of attorneys and types of attorneys are not well networked. In large cities, networks are extremely difficult to form and maintain because there are so many people. In smaller cities, recruiters are rarely used because everyone knows each other. Even in large cities, there are some networks that are very highly developed among attorneys from certain practice groups, as opposed to other practice groups.

One example of a tightly knit group of attorneys is bankruptcy attorneys in Silicon Valley. During the heyday of the dot-com boom, many of these attorneys had very little to do. They met in practice group meetings every few months (and most went because they were not that busy) and had a good idea of what everyone else was working on. When the legal market in Silicon Valley went south in late 2000, many of these dot-coms all of a sudden went bankrupt. The law firms in Silicon Valley, where the need for a bankruptcy attorney had once been nonexistent, suddenly boomed and needed lots of bankruptcy attorneys. Recruiters were very excited by this news, and, combined with the economic downturn, they saw a real opportunity to capitalize on a poor marketplace.

I was one of the recruiters who fell under this spell. Each time I would call a practicing bankruptcy attorney, the attorney would say something to the effect of (even if they had as little as one year of experience): "Oh, yeah, I already spoke with Partner X, the practice group leader at X firm the other day. He sure is busy. I told him I am happy but would give him a buzz in any event if I wanted to leave. He got some of that work from Y company's bankruptcy, you know. I know he is interviewing Marge from Z firm next week."

I was very surprised by the first couple of calls I made because they all went like this. After 20 or 30 phone calls, I realized that, with limited exceptions, all the bankruptcy attorneys in Silicon Valley already knew each other. Moreover, they also knew most of the bankruptcy attorneys in San Francisco and even knew a lot of the bankruptcy attorneys in Los Angeles—an area that is hundreds of miles away. In all my years of legal recruiting, I had come across a network this widespread only this once.

What this said to me is that the bankruptcy attorneys in the Silicon Valley had a very highly developed network. Whether this was due to the lack of bankruptcy work during the dot-com boom, which gave them time to socialize, the fact that there were so few bankruptcy attorneys in the area, or otherwise, it was an interesting phenomenon. Due to the highly developed network in Silicon Valley, these bankruptcy attorneys had no use for recruiters. If they needed a job with another Silicon Valley firm, the chances are they already

knew about it or knew someone that did.

Most of the legal world in larger cities is not like the bankruptcy practice group was in Silicon Valley during this time. In fact, in most major cities, there are hundreds of large law firms, and very few attorneys know each other. In addition, there are so many social networks in these legal communities that there is very little crossover and a real information vacuum. It is very difficult for attorneys to make their marks and develop networks of any substance in such legal markets. Few do. However, there are a few select attorneys who really realize the importance of all this networking. For them, there are more than enough organizations and other outside activities for them to get involved in.

In most large cities there is a virtual panoply of events and organizations that attorneys can get involved in. Beyond getting involved in the bar association, there are tons of groups that deal with issues regarding certain practice areas and numerous other issues, such as lawyers who are interested in human rights, lawyers who are interested in animals, or lawyers who are interested in the arts. In fact, the list is almost endless. There are so many such groups that they are very difficult to count.

I used to wonder when I saw the massive amounts of groups for attorneys in various large cities why attorneys possibly could have so much interest in all these groups. My thought was that if an attorney was interested in developments in contract law, for example, he would be better picking up a treatise when and if he needed information about these developments, or doing a quick LEXIS search to uncover this information, rather than going to some event. This, after all, would get you the same information you could get at the "conference." Furthermore, if you go to such a meeting or conference, you will have to take time off from work and billing, drive there, pay for parking, and sit around with a bunch of boring attorneys who are scoping each other out trying to find out who is who.

That is exactly the point of these conferences and meetings! When you go to meetings like this, you are taking the time to meet people. In addition, you are watching and listening to other attorneys outside your work and social circles and learning what they do. When you meet people you are learning of people they too might know and what they have in common. You are developing opportunities to add to the discussions that occur. You are developing the opportunity to speak personally about an issue. You are spreading your name around to others you otherwise might not meet, and you are developing a reputation based on your behavior. This is extremely important. The more you go to these meetings, the more familiar the people will become to you there and the more familiar you will become to them.

If you participate in networking events in more than a passing manner, you will soon be known by numerous attorneys and others throughout your city and outside your immediate circle. When this many people know you, they will also to some extent know about how things are going for you at work, and whether or not you might be interested in a new job. They will mention you to the myriad of people they know when one of these people might be looking for someone to fill a position. They may mention your name to companies and others that need someone with your skills to do legal work.

You will also have the opportunity to do people favors when you participate in groups and networking activities. When you have the opportunity to do people favors, they will want the opportunity to return the gestures. This too will increase the potential opportunities you have over time.

When you keep in touch with your law school and go to events, this increases your networking possibilities. When you keep in touch with people you have known in the past, this increases your networking possibilities. When you take an interest in certain causes, sit on a board unrelated to law, or write books and papers (related to the law or not), this too increases your networking possibilities. In fact, everything you do that involves interacting with other people increases your networking possibilities.

**How outstanding legal recruiters and other services can network for you**



One of the largest functions of my job is making networking happen for attorneys seeking jobs. There are several ways you can network when you are seeking a job. In the absence of very highly developed networks (which very few attorneys have), there are a few ways that I believe work quite well.

The very best way to get a position without a massive network you have built over years, in my opinion, is through an exceptional legal recruiter. The ability of recruiters to effectively network for law firms and candidates is what they are paid for and why some are more successful than others.

When times are very, very good, legal recruiters are often thought of in poor regard by attorneys seeking jobs because the perception is that all they are doing is making a simple introduction and collecting a large fee from the employer. This perception, however, ignores the reality of the situation. Most recruiters and legal recruiting firms are not that successful, and the reason is that they are not effective networking devices for either their clients or the attorneys they serve. Many legal recruiting firms are ignored in the market-no matter the quality of their candidates-because they do not do an effective job networking with their clients.

About three years ago I heard a story that sounded extremely strange to me at the time but over time has become quite meaningful. There was a certain individual in Beverly Hills that I met through my wife. This person owned a pawn shop and had only come over to the United States a few years ago from a foreign country. This was no ordinary pawn shop, however.

The main business of this pawn shop was loaning out money to movie stars and other outrageously wealthy people when they had financial problems. The people would bring by their rare art, Ferraris, jewelry--whatever--and the man would loan them pennies on the dollar in exchange for title and possession of these goods. In exchange for the loan, the people were charged interest, and part of the agreement was that if the people did not return the money they were loaned within a set length of time the pawnbroker would take possession of the goods. Suffice it to say, this pawnbroker was amazingly successful and had made millions of dollars doing this. He lived on the beach in Malibu, collected expensive rare sports cars, and had a very exciting playboy sort of lifestyle.

I asked a couple of people about how this man became so successful because I was curious as to how owning a pawn shop could bring such fantastic rewards. The business model certainly had something to do with it. Nevertheless, I knew there had to be something more.

When this man set up his first small pawn shop trading in trinkets, he immediately started asking who the best public relations person was in Los Angeles. He apparently asked around for months and then was repeatedly told a name of someone that was so good at public relations, her reputation eclipsed those of all the rest. The man phoned the public relations person's firm and was rudely told by a receptionist that the person did not take on any new clients unless the public relations person "approached them first." Notwithstanding, the man kept calling over weeks and months and was eventually put through to the public relations person.

The public relations person listened to the man gesticulate about how much he wanted her to work for him and how had heard so many good things about the public relations person. After a couple of minutes of this, the public relations person asked the man what he did. When he told her that he ran a pawn shop she quickly got him off the phone and told him she had no interest in doing public relations for a pawn shop. She also told the man that he could not afford her anyway because she charges a minimum retainer of \$200,000 for her work.

The next morning the man went to the public relations firm and told the receptionist that he wanted to see the public relations woman in person. The receptionist made a telephone call from her headset and told the man

that the public relations woman would not see him. The man told the receptionist he would wait.

And wait he did. Over the next two weeks, the man closed down his pawn shop and came by the public relations firm every day and sat in the lobby until the firm closed each night. Each day he was rebuffed and stated he would wait. After two weeks of this, the receptionist finally looked up at the man and stated: "she will see you now." The man met with the public relations woman, literally got on his knees and begged (the man was a commando in the country he came from) and she agreed to represent him.

Within two weeks, the public relations woman had gotten stories running on the cover of the Los Angeles Times and stories placed in a couple of major magazines that were all variously titled "Pawnbroker to the Stars." These articles made the man's business take off in a hurry. In fact, they took his business to the moon. From what I understand, it quickly became one of the most successful pawn shops in the country.

What the pawnbroker understood, and what many candidates of legal recruiting firms do not understand, is there are certain people that by virtue of their position in society, are uniquely placed in networks and can influence public opinion. I could write about the legal recruiting profession forever because I love it so much, but when it comes right down to it, a good legal recruiter can influence the course of your career because a good legal recruiter is well networked.

Good legal recruiters are well networked because they are constantly speaking with law firms about what the law firm needs all day, every day. They are well networked because, by their very relationship with law firms, a dynamic is set up where certain law firms are likely to listen to them when the recruiter is serious. They are also an important "voice" inside the legal profession and someone who has direct contact with hiring partners and other hiring personnel inside law firms. This is essentially no different than what a good public relations firm can do for a company or individual. There are people who by their very nature and position in society can make your case heard.

I have worked with countless candidates who, before I represented them, did not get a single interview. Once I was involved, they had job offers within a day or two (often at the same firms that had rebuffed or ignored these attorneys when they approached them on their own). I know what a good legal recruiter can do, and what a good recruiter can do is just as profound as what the public relations person was able to do for the pawn shop owner.

Given the highly specialized work that good legal recruiters do, it should be no surprise that they cannot represent everyone in their job search. They have to have a certain set of standards for the candidates they represent, or else they are likely to lose credibility with the law firms they serve, which will harm their future efforts. The best recruiting firms typically have the highest standards. A good legal recruiter also spends a lot of time and effort on each candidate's behalf and therefore can only work with a few people at one time.

Good legal recruiters must also believe in the candidate who is seeking to get a job. If they believe in the candidate and the candidate's motive for getting a job, they will likely be more successful. Just as a candidate who does not really want a job will be unsuccessful in his/her own networking efforts often, so too will a legal recruiter be unsuccessful on a candidate's behalf if he believes that the candidate does not really want a job. When I have a candidate who really wants a job I will do everything possible within my power to ensure I get him a job. A good legal recruiter does that.

I have been quite clear in the past that I believe that most legal recruiters are not all that good at what they do. The reason that most legal recruiters are not all that good is that they are not networked or do not take the effort it requires to nurture individual networks. When you are using someone to network on your behalf, you had better be certain that person is well placed and knows what she is doing. This is essential.

Given that recruiters charge employers fees, the firms they deal with are likely to be the very best firms, and the candidates they place are likely to be the attorneys coming from the very best firms (or attorneys in lesser firms with narrow skills, or outstanding qualifications). The involvement of a recruiter with these sorts of attorneys is a definite value added, and, in fact, from most law firms it is expected that you are one of these sorts of attorneys. Firms are often suspicious if the best attorneys are not using a recruiter and believe that they are not represented by a recruiter because recruiters think there is something wrong with them!

Imagine if Brad Pitt approached a major studio and negotiated a major picture deal alone without an agent. The studios would think this is strange and wonder why he was not using an agent. The same holds true of stellar attorneys approaching major law firms. If Brad Pitt approached a small unknown studio used to hiring no-name actors for very little money through an agent, the firm likely would not deal with the agent. It could not afford to deal with the agent and would think that Brad Pitt would be unlikely to do a picture with them anyway. If Brad Pitt approached a small studio on his own without an agent the studio would be delighted and try and sign him up at their low rates. It works the same way if you are a top credentialed attorney coming from a top firm and approaching employers. The dynamic is no different.

The majority of attorneys--over 90%--do not have the credentials to deal with a top recruiting firm, just as the majority of actors and actresses do not have the credentials to deal with a top agent (or any agent at all). The vast majority of any profession should not be dealing with agents.

For attorneys looking to change jobs, it can be exceptionally hard to build an effective and large network in a short length of time. This is impossible in most major cities. This is also often impossible with the work schedules that many attorneys are under because they have very little time for anything but work. One such method is to create your own network by applying to all the firms in a given city that match your interests. While this method will not give you the benefit of the relationships that recruiters have, there are other advantages of doing this that outweigh using a recruiter for all but the best attorneys.

Given the fact that recruiters play a limited role in the job search process for most attorneys, they need to look for ways to network themselves and do so rapidly. This is especially true if an attorney is coming out of law school and looking for an immediate job. This is also especially true if an attorney is relocating to another city where he or she does not know anyone. Finally, this is especially true for most attorneys because they are so concerned and concentrated on the mechanics of what they do that they do not have the time to network at all. When they are looking for a new job they need to establish an immediate network.

One company I know of to help attorneys establish these networks is [LawCrossing](#). This company undertakes the massive task of monitoring the hiring needs of every law firm and corporation in the United States. This company has undertaken a massive effort. The work it does is profound, and there are consistently more than 50,000 jobs on the site.

Despite my best efforts with BCG Attorney Search, I must admit that nothing can take the place of you doing good old-fashioned networking to establish your value and assist you in getting a job. A legal recruiter has a place in all this; however, you do too. Job boards like LawCrossing have a place in this; however, you do too. Over time, a good attorney needs to develop strong networks. Without these networks, you are going to face obstacles to getting a job.

### **The Importance of Networking to Keeping a Job Inside a Law Firm**

You will have a very hard time remaining employed in any law firm for an extended period of time if you cannot network within your law firm. You need a strong network within your employment organization in order to survive.

When I was employed inside law firms, and in all the jobs I have ever held in my life, one thing became clear



to me: most often the people that get fired are not fired for performance reasons but are let go because people do not like them. When someone is fired, it could be one person that does not like them, or it could be several. Let's examine this for a moment.

If one person does not like you inside a law firm, you might not think you have much of a problem. In fact, there are very few attorneys currently practicing in law firms of more than 10 or so people that do not have "nonfans" within their firm. This is to be expected and is just part of the random ordering of human events, and this occurs inside all organizations.

Nevertheless, if one person does not like you inside a law firm-especially a superior-you are going to need to be on the defensive. One person cannot usually bring you down for non-substantive reasons, but could if you do not have strong networks of support. For example, if one person does not like you, he or she will typically look for small ways to slight you, both in your presence and outside of your presence. He or she may attempt to get all the other attorneys inside of your law firm to dislike you as well. This is no easy task to accomplish. The only way they can accomplish this is (1) if you are not aware of it and (2) if you do not have any defenders inside the law firm who will speak up for you when your detractor speaks negatively of you. The only way you are going to become aware of this and have defenders in your organization is through building a strong network.

Something I hear a lot after I place an attorney with a law firm is a variant of: "Well, I know I am going to do fine here because I am just working hard, keeping my head down and going home at the end of the day. I'm not going to get involved in all the politics of this place like I did where I was before."

When I used to hear this statement, my thought was that this person was being smart. In retrospect, I believe that there is a lot to be said about being networked inside a law firm. It is true that if you are not networked you do not risk upsetting people as much outside of your day-to-day interactions. Nevertheless, there are ways to play networking too. You do not want to go too far with your networking. It is a bad idea, of course, to sleep with people in the office, say stupid things about your boss behind his or her back, and backstab other attorneys when you are out after work, and so forth. This can get you into trouble, and some of this stuff is likely to occur if you do not maintain a certain distance. Nevertheless, you should have strong and stable networks at work.

A network inside a law firm can tell you which partners to avoid. A network can tell you which partners have the most power, even when it is not evident. A network can tell you which associates are on the way out. A network can tell you who has a lot of work if you do not currently have a lot of work. All of these things that a network provides are quite useful and can assist you with growing in your firm. In fact, access to this sort of information is essential to your success and survival inside of a law firm. Without networks, you will not have access to this sort of information and will be penalized for this lack of knowledge.

## Why Unnetworked Legal Careers Die

Networking is extremely important to both getting a job and keeping a job inside a law firm. While an entire treatise could be written about the value of networking, I think it is useful to examine how an inability to network can kill your legal career. Of the many things that can kill your legal career, or even prevent it from taking off, the inability to network is one of the strongest.

When I was in college, I was a very good student and knew all of the other 10 or so really good students in my class because we were all nominated by the school for Rhodes Scholarships, Fulbright Scholarships, and other sorts of things, and the school had a few meetings where they got all of us together to discuss this and other stuff. None of us in this little group got Rhodes Scholarships that year, and so most of us applied to law school. Then most of us waited until March or whenever the results of our applications rolled in.

One of those students was particularly close with one of our professors, and I remember thinking that this woman was somewhat of a brown noser and did not understand why one student would spend so much time chatting with this particular professor. This professor was also someone who was quite well known in the national academic community. At some point in their professional relationship, this woman had told the professor that a certain law school (which at the time was the number-one law school in the United States) was her first choice. She told me this one evening when we were at some event or another discussing where we were applying to law school.

A couple of days before the deadline for law school applications were due, she sent hers in. Something quite remarkable then happened. Within five days of sending her application across the country to this law school, she had received an acceptance letter from the law school back in the mail. She was accepted at the top law school in the United States the very same day it had received her application. The rest of us mortals had to wait for months. This was a lesson for me in the value of networks and their importance even at this early stage in my exposure to the legal profession. Not only had this woman done an exceptional job networking with her professor, the professor had obviously done an even better job networking with some people inside the number-one law school. He did such an outstanding job, in fact, that I doubt they even needed to read her application. I saw something similar to this again a couple of years later.

When I was in my second year of law school, I was sitting outside the office of a law professor who is quite famous nationally. I was waiting to speak with him about a paper I was writing for his class. During my time at the law school, I had noticed that he spent a lot of time chatting with another law student in the halls and that this student was often present on one or two occasions when I had stopped by this professor's office to chat about the same paper. The two of them were always debating about some intellectual topic or another. Once again, I pegged the woman talking to the professor as a brown-noser. I remember thinking, at the time, that she was wasting her time talking about all this intellectual gobbledygook with the professor, and if she were smart she would spend more time studying. I had some mutual acquaintances of this law student and knew she was an average, but not stellar, student. What I heard on that particular day was quite astonishing to me and something I will likely never forget.

The professor was talking to a law firm and said something like the following:

"Grades are fine. She will work hard. I have already talked to X firm and Y firm, and they are not making her an offer. She belongs with you, and if you make her an offer, she will accept it. She's perfect for you guys. I already spoke to Z in your firm, and he told me that he would make an exception on the grades for me."

I had no idea this sort of thing went on. Needless to say, the student ended up at one of the top law firms in the United States. In fact, some people might say it is the top law firm in the United States.

What is so interesting about all of this is that this sort of thing happens every day. Somewhere in your midst, there is a powerful person who can get you started--as these two people got their boost--from powerful, networked and well-known professors. If these students had not taken the time to get networked with these professors as they did, the results they achieved might not have occurred. Here, these students did an exceptional job networking with simply one person. Imagine the results you can get over the course of your legal career if you network and put yourself in the corner of 10, 20, 50, or 100+ people like that. You would be very surprised. It is possible.

How does a man from a blue-collar family in Arkansas become President of the United States? How does a Hollywood actor become President of the United States? I once heard somewhere that Bill Clinton never forgot a face of anyone he met. While I am not sure that is true, I am sure there is some element of truth. I have heard numerous stories of Bill Clinton walking up to people he met only for a moment 20 or 30 years

previously and saying hello and asking about particulars of the person's life such as their family from that time in the past.

All over the United States, there are well-networked attorneys whose careers are in the stratosphere. People like Johnnie Cochran, Jeffrey Fieger, Greta Van Susteren, and others. None of these people would likely be considered a good attorney by many big firm litigators. They are considered good attorneys by most of the public, and they are the people that Americans look to when they are interested in knowing about the law. I would argue that whatever you say about these attorneys' education or big firm experience, they would not care. They are more influential, more connected, more known, and make more money than probably 99.5% of all big firm attorneys. These are all people with a great deal of power because they are networked and connected to the American people.

In the large firm arena, aside from the media, there are thousands of attorneys who are very well networked both inside and outside their law firms. They are so well networked that their firms would likely never risk losing them. These are the law school classmates who call you every six months to see how you are doing. These are the people you meet that know tons of people all around the country. These are also the sorts of attorneys who have the most business and the most power inside their law firms. These are the sorts of people that really succeed in the practice of law. They succeed because of their ability to connect all over the place and with numerous types of people.

If you fail to network with associates or partners inside your firm, you will eventually run into problems inside your own firm. If you fail to network outside of your firm, you will have more difficulty getting a job and will likely have a difficult time ever getting business and therefore having security within your firm. Attorneys who fail in the practice of law and many of those who leave the practice of law do so because they don't network.

One of the more typical things I see in my job as a legal recruiter are partners from major law firms who have no business. These partners rose through the associate ranks based upon their hard work, dedication, and demonstrated skill set. They also rose because some partner within their firm had enough work to support them at the partner level. They would not have risen had someone not had a lot of business.

This is a very precarious position to be in. When a partner does not have a substantial book of portable business, he or she will be let go and asked to look for a job if the work the firm is doing dries up. It cannot be any other way. A partner needs to be self-sustaining in terms of his or her work for his or her survival. If the partner sits in his/her office all day and night and does nothing but churn out legal work, his or her contribution is limited to that. If he/she tries to bring in his own work and work that others can do, his or her contribution is far greater. The firm wants to keep him or her around.

Without networking outside the law firm, the partner has nothing but their skills to offer and may eventually lose their job. They will certainly never likely have the high standing within their firm that those who bring in the work do. I have seen partners from AmLaw 100 law firms hang up their own shingle and do divorces after they were let go because they had no clients and the firm stopped giving them work. In some extreme cases, I have seen partners like this do things like open a diner in a small town and make less than \$20,000 a year. Regardless of whether they are happy in their new job, these partners would have been on a far different track had they learned how to network.

You need to understand that your entire career is dependent upon networking, and longevity is not possible without it. If you do not network, and do so consistently, you will likely eventually be in trouble.

## Conclusions

Networking is one of the most fundamental necessities for long-term success in the practice of law. Your

legal career depends on networking from the time you are in law school until the time you retire.

One of the greatest tragedies of the law school education and the practice of law is that the importance of networking is barely emphasized (if at all). With the advent of mega law firms over the past 50 years, the importance of networking is still there-and more important than ever-but many attorneys do not realize it because they are insulated by mounds of work. With great amounts of work coming from partners, a young attorney's superiors will not necessarily tell their subordinates the importance of networking either.

The way to succeed in the practice of law is to form networks and go out and use those networks.

When I first started practicing law, one of my good friends who made partner that same year told me: "You do not have to work all the time and need to realize that no partner in this firm is ever going to tell you that. It is not in their best interest. You need to make time for yourself on your own. If you work all the time, you'll never have time to do the things you want to do for yourself."

See [The Four Types of Attorneys: The Finder, Minder, Binder and Grinder](#) for more information.

How true. The same logic applies to networking. No one is going to tell you to network. It is not in their best interest. You need to network because if you do not do this, you will not have anywhere near the legal career you could have if you did network.