How Attorneys and Law Students Can Use Networking to Find Legal Positions

By Harrison Barnes from Los Angeles Office Managing Director

The most common method of getting a position is through networking. You are better off using networking to get defined positions than just applying on your own. You can get much farther than you would without knowing someone. You need to impress everyone you meet because they can help you.

1. Getting Defined Positions Through Networking

A defined position is one that exists and is going to be filled regardless of whether you network or not. These positions are advertised, posted on an employer's website, or filled on an annual basis.

You are always better off networking to get defined positions than not.

When I was younger and in high school, I heard the story of an admissions officer at Stanford University who had a pile of highly-qualified candidates he needed to choose from to offer admission. Out of the 100 applicants, however, he could only admit 20. He sat in his office, reviewing all of the applicants. Each applicant seemed uniquely qualified in some way—whether it was test scores or other characteristics. Each had good essays, and there were good reasons to admit each. After a few hours of trying to distinguish between them, he put them all in one pile and threw them to the bottom of the stairs. He chose the 20 who landed closest to the bottom of the stairs.

For the longest time, I assumed this was an "urban myth" of sorts. Incredibly, however, fifteen or so years later, I was at a conference in Silicon Valley and went to a discussion on user experience on websites. There was an admissions officer from Stanford leading one of the presentations. Incredibly, he said someone in his office had once done something very similar to the "urban myth" I heard when I was in high school. With so many qualified applicants, the officer realized there was no way to reasonably distinguish between the people and left it to chance.

I thought about this recently because it reminded me of something I know is true: None of those applicants would have been thrown down the stairs if they had known someone in the admissions office, or the school, who went to bat for them. The school would have admitted them before that happened.

See Also:

- The Importance of Endorsements, References and Getting Others to Cheer for You
In every area of your life, if you know someone who has some impact on whether to let you into an organization and that person likes you, you can get much farther than you would without knowing someone. If you want to achieve anything of significance, you must know someone. Knowing people and having people like you gets things done.

When I was just starting in business, I worked in downtown Los Angeles. At the time, there were three clubs people belonged to--The Los Angeles Athletic Club, the Jonathan Club, and the California Club. Each club and has places to eat, gyms, saunas, and hotels inside of them.

Anyone can belong to the Los Angeles Athletic Club. You can walk in off the street and join. At the time, the initiation fee was maybe $500. I joined the Los Angeles Athletic Club right away.

The Jonathan Club and California Club are different, however. There is a saying in Los Angeles that the people who run Los Angeles belong to the Jonathan Club, and the people who own Los Angeles belong to the California Club. People like Charlie Munger (Warren Buffet's business partner) belong to the California Club, for example.

When I was practicing law, a partner in my law firm belonged to the California Club and took a few associates and me to lunch there--it seemed like a nice place, but inhabited by many older, stuffier people.

However, during my work, I kept meeting people who were from Los Angeles whose parents belonged to the Jonathan Club and now also belonged there. I was impressed with many of these people because they were running respectable businesses in Los Angeles, and I wanted to see what everything was about in terms of this club. I would proudly tell these people I belonged to the Los Angeles Athletic Club, and they made no face at all. There were many different sorts of people than I know who belonged to the Los Angeles Athletic Club. I worked in a building with many Jewelry manufacturers, for example, that I liked, and they belonged to the Los Angeles Athletic Club. They were from countries around the world with names I could not pronounce, and many did not even speak English. In contrast, the people I knew who belonged to the Jonathan Club were well-dressed, established people who had good educational backgrounds, spoke English, and ran larger companies where they did not work with their hands making things.

One day I walked over there with another attorney I knew and went inside to look around. A few minutes into our journey, as we stood there admiring the lobby and ornate ceiling fifty feet above this, security showed up along with a dignified, well-dressed woman who gave us an angry look. The woman informed us we did not belong, were not dressed to be in the lobby (men were required to wear a sport coat to be there), and escorted us out. I was very embarrassed. Right then and there, I told myself that I would learn how people got into this club and do so.

It turned out you needed to have three people recommend you. You needed to know these people well. They had to have spent time at your home and you at their home. You were required to have interviews with other people in the club. The initiation fee was tens of thousands of dollars. There were numerous other requirements as well that I do not remember. The main thing, however, was that you needed to network and know certain people to join the club. If you wanted to associate with these people and use their facilities, you needed to have people vouch for you.

See Also:

- Using Connections
Relationships, Commodities, and Making Connections

I was so "scarred" from being kicked out of the club and so impressed with the members I did know that I spent the next three years meeting new people, networking, and eventually getting sponsored by people to join the Jonathan Club. It was a good experience because it forced me to network and meet people and also become known. When I had my final interview for the club, one of the several people I interviewed was concerned I did not know people at the club well enough to join. That was a surprise to me because I had gotten to know several people. The people I did get to know subsequently referred many business opportunities to me I would never have had if I had not joined the club. Doing so provided many benefits.

Many employers, clubs, and other organizations are closed off to people unless you know someone. Years ago, I wanted to join an organization called TED (the originator of the TED talks). I applied for a few years, and they rejected me. Then one year, I was invited to an event in Aspen where they did a simulcast of the real event. When I got there, I met a woman who was a membership director for the actual event, and we had drinks and dinner together. I asked her why I could not go to the real event with 1000 people, where the likes of Mark Zuckerberg, Al Gore, and Bill Gates were socializing.

She told me that no one knew me, and unless I was a household name like Bill Gates, I needed to meet more people. She offered to start introducing me to people and also asked me the extent of my philanthropy and donations to organizations. She said this was very important. At that moment, I realized I was relatively unimportant compared to some of the members. If I wanted to join, I would need to make a significant effort in networking and meeting people--around the country.

I concluded I was not interested in this organization enough to do the networking I would need to become a full-fledged member of it.

Whether it is a college, club, or an important organization, knowing people is extremely important.

If you are applying to a college or law school, and want to get in based just on your numbers--you may get in if your numbers qualify you to do so, or you may not. If you know someone, however, this will change everything. Knowing people that can vouch for you will give you a decided advantage. It is all about connection and who knows you. If you are connected, you are much more likely to get in and get things done.

When you are searching for a legal job, a connection is incredibly important. Knowing people will make things happen that would not occur otherwise. It seems always to work that way.

Early in my legal placement career, I went out of my way to meet every single candidate I could. I did this because I recognized something extraordinary early on: If I met someone, I almost always got them a job. If I did not meet someone, the odds of me getting them a position went down dramatically. It was as if having met them changed the game of placement.

When I met someone, I would call the law firms to which I was marketing the person. I would describe their personality, how that would fit in with the culture of the firm, and what I liked about the person--how they dressed, how they carried themselves, and any personal information I might have about the person. Having met the candidate and described them in detail, changed the game. The candidate went from being just a piece of paper to being a much stronger candidate in all respects. They had a connection to me that I was able to translate during my representation of the candidate.
Meeting with the candidate was so important that I started going out of my way to travel to meet candidates all over the country. I would fly to various cities for short meetings with my candidates.

Almost always, when I would do these meetings before speaking with the firms, my candidates would get more interviews and jobs.

Then, I also started to realize that if I met with law firms after I met with the candidates, I would make more placements and get more interviews. The connections I was able to make with law firms and the candidates resulted in far more placements and get people more jobs. It was as if being able to communicate that I met the person and vouched for them carried a ton of weight with law firms. After I met the person, sharing this information in person carried even more weight.

**See Also:**

- *How Attorneys Can Network: Why Networking is Essential to Attorney Success*

People want connection. Law firms want connection. You want a connection. Effective placement and job hunting is all about connection and meeting people and having them understand you as a person and then tell your story.

When I applied to both college and law school, once I decided on the schools I wanted to attend, I made sure I met the admissions officers and that they remembered me. I wrote them and connected with them throughout the admissions cycle, and it worked. I became more than just a number.

For law school, the school I wanted to go to only admitted about 7% of the people applying from out of state. Those were not good odds. I went to an admissions event the school held in Chicago when I was a sophomore and met the admissions director. I called him a few times a year for two years and chatted with him. I wrote him letters. I also met someone from my college that was admitted there and more senior than I. When he went to school, I traveled there and visited him. I stopped by the admissions office with him and met the admissions director again and told him I had gone to a few classes. I wrote the admissions director and said to him that I enjoyed visiting the school. It worked even though my numbers were lower than the people who ended up getting in from out of state.

I did something similar for college. I met the admissions director, wrote him letters, visited the school, attended classes, wrote about my experience, and more. That worked too.

You may think this method of getting admitted to top colleges and law schools is unusual; however, I have never taken networking for granted for getting to the top of the pile. Unless you do this, it is going to be much more difficult for you to get into any ultra-competitive organization.

When I was in my early 30s, I decided I wanted to go to Stanford Business School - a place that had roughly a 3% admissions rate at the time and was generally seeking to admit people far younger than I was. I went out of my way to meet and connect with people in the admissions office. That worked too.

Most of the success I have in terms of getting into any sort of organization, I owe to networking. When it comes to getting people into law firms, a great deal of my success is also due to networking. When you network, great things happen, and you achieve much more than you might otherwise. Schools, law firms, and other organizations have far more people interested in them than they could otherwise admit. The only way to get ahead and get into places like this is through networking. If you have exceptional qualifications, you
can get jobs and more without networking, of course. But if you want to get in somewhere and are competing with lots of people with better qualifications, you are going to be far better off networking.

The question is, then, how do you network for existing positions?

When I network, I simply decide on something I want and then go after it. If you want something, you come across people in day-to-day life that can lead to you getting it. When you know what you want, you find people who can help you get it. You need to seek out personal connections and use these connections. When you do meet people, you need to decide that you want to go after these people who can help you achieve the things you want. The more you connect with these people and use these relationships, the better off you will be.

See Also:

- Getting Referrals from Powerful People (We All Know Someone)

When I was in college, I was considering transferring to Harvard University. I knew two kids in my class who moved to Harvard University. After they transferred, I found out these kids were visiting my college and decided to seek them out. I asked them a bunch of questions and spent a weekend socializing with each of them. One of these people was friends with the person at Harvard who processed transfer applications. He knew her through his brother, who had dated her, and this led to them reviewing his transfer application. I explained to him my reasons for wanting to transfer and then spent a pleasant weekend with him and some of my other friends. He told me he could arrange a call with the admissions woman if I had any questions and told me he would put in a good word for me.

A few days after the weekend, I got a call from the woman in the admissions office. He had told her about me, and she asked if I had any questions. She said she was "looking forward" to getting my applications. I was shocked by this because I was not sure I was even going to apply. Had I used this contact to try and into the school, it might have worked. You can seemingly network your way into anywhere.

Networking is an incredible way to get a job that already exists. If you are applying to a position that already exists, if you know someone or can make a personal connection with someone, you are far more likely to get the job than if you do not use connections to get the position.

People have built-in mechanisms that require networking. As a general rule, people do not trust other people. If someone comes to you without a recommendation, our built-in defense mechanism makes us suspicious of them. We are like this because, as a species, it has always been difficult for us to distinguish between people with good and bad motives--or between good and bad people. Unless someone comes to us recommended by others, we are not likely to trust them because there could be problems with their performance, honesty, work ethic, and more.

For law firms and legal employers, references are essential. In the legal profession, there are all sorts of bad attorneys out there. Some attorneys do not work as hard as they say they do, cut corners, lie about their business, are lazy, rush through work, talk badly about every employer, and are generally not good at what they do. Some attorneys create problems and issues wherever they work.

There is an unwritten rule in the legal profession that attorneys are not supposed to speak negatively about other attorneys. Therefore, checking references is often a waste of time, and it is often tough to know who these attorneys really are--unless there is a positive endorsement of them from someone else.
2. Getting Positions in the Emerging Marketplace Through Networking

In addition to defined positions, some positions do not even exist yet. Most law firms, businesses, and other legal employers have jobs they have not defined but exist nevertheless.

In the legal placement business, the majority of placements I make in law firms are for positions the law firms have not advertised anywhere! I want to repeat this to be as transparent as possible: The majority of placements I make are for jobs that law firms have not advertised anywhere.

Early in my legal career, after September 2001, I started a business called Legal Authority. This business mails out letters to companies, law firms, and others in a legal market even if they do not have any positions advertised anywhere. Incredibly, almost everyone who used the service got multiple job offerings after they had been trying (unsuccessfully) to find positions through other means. They had merely been applying to advertised legal job openings.

A friend of mine had lost a position working in-house and had not told me because he was embarrassed. For months he had been trying to find positions using job sites, legal recruiters that just sent him to openings, and more. He was in a practice area where there were no jobs. I told him I would do a mass mailing for him to legal employers, and within a week of doing so, he had 10+ interviews with companies, law firms, and more. He ended up getting a position with a major law firm that did not have an opening, and it changed his life and career.

A law firm will hire you if they have work to do and can make money off of you. A company will hire you if they have the work and can save or make money by hiring you. No one needs an opening to hire you. If you want to work in a given law firm, you need to find someone there who can help you.

Someone I once knew wanted to work in the law firm where I was working. He was working for a third-rate insurance defense firm at the time, and I was at a law firm populated primarily by graduates of Ivy League law schools and Stanford Law School. He had been out of law school over ten years, was a graduate of Loyola Law School in Los Angeles, and did not have anything in his background that would have otherwise qualified him to work at my law firm.

He had the opportunity one day to do a trial against a partner from my law firm and took it. He wanted to get to know an attorney from my law firm and show him that he was qualified to work at my law firm. He prepared as well as he possibly could and did a great job in the trial and won. Moreover, he also did a great job networking with the attorney he faced. He met with him at lunch during the trial, struck up many informal conversations with him, expressed some dissatisfaction with his current employer, and, without ever asking for it, was offered a position with the law firm where he wanted to work.

There was no opening, and he was not qualified to work there.

When you network to find a position that does not exist, you ask questions and meet people that may have work for which they can hire you. In the past, I hired numerous attorneys who networked their way into positions when there was not even a need.

See Also:

Get a Job Through Networking
One memorable hire was a young attorney a rabbi recommended. I had taken a class with a rabbi years ago, and we stayed in touch. A few years into this relationship, he contacted me and said one of his son’s friends had recently graduated from law school and was unable to find a position. The reason was that he was 19 and the youngest graduate in history from the University of California Berkeley. I met with the attorney and liked him. Because I also liked the rabbi, I hired him even though I did not have an opening. I took on an extra expense of over $10,000 a month to bring in someone with a connection to someone I liked a great deal.

When you know people, and make them aware of positions that you have, these people can help you get jobs and often do. One of the most important things you can do to find positions is network into them.

Years ago, a recruiter that worked in my company noticed I did not have an in-house attorney and asked me if I would be willing to speak with a friend of hers about working for me. I told her I would be happy to and did. Because he was a friend of hers and came highly recommended, I hired him.

A substantial number of attorneys working in my company as recruiters have come through recommendations. A considerable amount of employees in other areas of the company have come through recommendations of people already working in the company. My accountant, outside attorney, and several other vendors who work for me came through people who already knew them, and I hired them when I did not even have an identified need. I hired these people because others recommended them.

You can network your way into numerous positions that do not even exist if you know the right people.

Employers hire when there is a possible business need, regardless of whether or not the employer has identified that need.

When I hired people for jobs that did not exist, I did so because I had the work and saw no reason not to hire the person. There was no drawback to hiring the person because I figured I would not lose and could likely even make money by hiring the person.

If a law firm has work piling up, the firm can make money by hiring you. If the law firm likes you or believes it could use you, it will take recommendations extremely seriously if it is interested in hiring you. An opening does not need to exist for the law firm to pull the trigger and hire you.

You can work with anyone you want if you know how to network.

See Also:

• How to Network

When I was in college, I read a book called Unlimited Power by Anthony Robbins. It was one of the most inspirational books I had ever read and has been a powerful motivator. I was so impressed with this book that I dreamed of meeting the author and perhaps working with him. Then I read another book by Robbins a few years later, and this further motivated me. A few years after that, I listened to some tapes by Robbins and was inspired to quit practicing law and start businesses helping attorneys get jobs. I completed a goal-setting seminar given by Robbins and set goals based on what I heard, and within a few years had achieved those goals.

About five years into my legal placement career, I was at a seminar and heard a speaker named Chet Holmes talk about the fact that he knew Robbins. I knew that if I ever wanted to meet Robbins, this was my
chance. After the speaker finished his presentation, I approached him and introduced myself. The speaker was well-known at the time and had formerly worked with Charlie Munger and had a successful career.

I learned everything I could about Holmes and purchased a course by him. I listened to and studied the entire course. After doing this, I contacted Holmes and asked him if he would be interested in doing some consulting work for my business. I hired him to do some work and spent a day with him. I stayed in touch with him and had dinner with him a few times when he was in Los Angeles, invited him to my house on a couple of occasions, and got to know him and his family well. When he was writing his #1 best selling book, the Ultimate Sales Machine, I read early drafts of it and gave him feedback on it. I became his biggest fan, and, in return, he became mine.

As he became more and more well-known and his book shot to the top of the best-seller list, Anthony Robbins became interested in doing a seminar with Chet, and the two of them did. I told Chet I wanted to meet Robbins, and he arranged a personal meeting. When I met Robbins, I explained the effect he had on my life, how much I admired him and how much I would like to work with him in the future. I told him I had several business ideas we could work on together and created a presentation.

Robbins invited me to his home in Fiji, and I spent a week with him there. Then, Robbins asked me to travel with him to Australia, and we spent another week together there. I met Robbins again when he was in Los Angeles, then went to London to do some work for him there. I ended up taking a role in a company he owned and started a business in the Company that I ran and split the profits with him for two years. Then Robbins allowed me to speak at his seminars about the business.

I created a job with Robbins based on my ability to network into it. I firmly believe you can network into doing anything, with anyone, if you know what you are doing. I have done this sort of networking to meet many of my idols and other people I admire. I have met best selling authors, business tycoons, movie stars, and others all based on my ability to find and meet people they know. If you know how to network, you can meet anyone.

See Also:

- Is Your Networking Working

3. How to Network to Find a Legal Position

A. You Need to Know Exactly What You Want

The first thing you need to do is know what you want.

I knew I wanted to work with Robbins. I knew I wanted to go to Stanford Business School, the University of Virginia Law School, the University of Chicago College. I knew I wanted to belong to the Jonathan Club.

Because I knew I wanted those things, I went out of my way to find people and ingratiate myself with people who had contacts with those organizations. None of those things would have happened to me if I did not want them first.

You are far better off wanting something specific than wanting something general.

It is better to want to work for a particular employer than merely wishing to work in a profession generally.
If you have reasons for wanting something, then that person, or organization, is going to want you far more.

I had excellent reasons for wanting to go to the University of Chicago and was able to communicate that. I liked the academic atmosphere and their emphasis on the mind, and I felt comfortable there. I liked that the University of Virginia Law School did not take itself too seriously and emphasized the social aspects of being a lawyer and relationships rather than competitiveness. I learned everything I could about the cultures of these places and was able to articulate this and connect with this.

I did the same thing with Robbins. Out of the millions of people that would probably like to sit down with him and communicate with him on an ongoing basis, as I did for several years, I was able to rise to the top of that pile as well. I did this through networking and searching out places where I could make those connections.

B. Utilize Your Network to Get a Legal Position

1. Write Down Your Network and Make Sure You Utilize It

Regardless of who you are, you have a network.

Most people know between 100 and 500 people. You need to write down everyone you know. Once you write down everyone you know, you need to figure out a way to get in contact with each of these people and check-in. You need to call or meet with as many as possible to see how they are doing. This approach can work wonders.

Your list should contain:
- Friends
- Former friends
- Acquaintances of friends
- Relatives
- Co-workers
- Former co-workers
- Classmates you knew in college and law school
- Professors from college and law school
- Neighbors
- People you do business with
- Former clients
- Current clients
- Neighbors
- Former neighbors
- People your spouse or significant other knows
- People you know from clubs and organizations you belong to

Once you write down this list, you need to contact these people and get in touch with them. There are lots of ways to do this; however, almost always, the most effective way is to make telephone contact with these people and just "check-in" and see how they are doing. When you do this, all you need to do is listen and try and make conversation. At some point in the discussion, some of these people will ask how you are doing, and after talking about other topics, it is always a good idea to mention you may be looking for a position.

When I wanted to work with Robbins, however, I did not go up to Chet Holmes and immediately make this clear. I spent years impressing Holmes and making myself worthy of the introduction. I earned the introduction and did not ask for it. By the time the introduction came, it was so glowing and so positive that Robbins had no choice but to meet with me and was more than enthusiastic about doing so once he saw I
was interested in him.

See Also:

- **Ways to Leverage Your Network**

If you are to go far with networking, the most important thing you can do is be as interested as possible in the people with whom you are networking. You cannot merely contact someone on the phone and ask for a recommendation out of the blue.

When I was in my first year of law school, I wrote a letter to the stepfather of my ex-girlfriend's best friend seeking a summer job. I had met him one time. I then called him and asked him if I could meet with his law firm. He hung up on me.

I went about this the wrong way. There was a much better approach if I wanted to work there.

What I should have done was call him on the phone, or message him, and asked him if I could meet him for coffee, or at his office to ask some questions. I could have told him I did not know any attorneys in Detroit and wanted to get some information about the law firms in Detroit and what it would be like to work in Detroit. This approach would have been an informational interview.

Most people will meet with you if you ask them for an informational interview. Asking takes courage, and it's something most people won't do. I have no idea why. People are more than enthusiastic about sharing their experience and knowledge. It is also quite flattering when people ask this of us. When is the last time someone asked you for advice? Most people do not ask for help like this.

If I had made this call, the man surely would have agreed to meet with me. If I had done this right, I would have met with him and asked him what his job is like, what his firm is like, and where else he worked in his career. I would have asked him how he chose his practice area, how he got into the practice of law, if he likes his work, and whether he would do it all over again. I would not have talked about myself, and if he asked, I would have told him I was interested in working in Detroit - but he would have already known that based on my request for an informational interview.

That is what I would have done if I had been smart. I would have asked to meet based on my connection and simply gone with that. Focusing my interaction on wanting something was a huge mistake. Everyone does that. If you can, ask for informational interviews. These are so much more effective because they catch people off guard and make them the focus, not you.

See Also:

- **How "Consistency" and "Relationship Building" Will Aid You in Your Job Search**

2. **Continuously Work on Developing a New Network**

When I was practicing at Quinn Emanuel, John Quinn and another founding partner of the firm, Bill Urquhart, held a meeting one lunch hour on how to get legal business.

John Quinn, at the time, was considered one of the top attorneys in the United States.
John said something I will never forget. He said the biggest regret of his career had always been not being more helpful to people he met earlier in his career. He explained that he burned bridges with people who could have helped him. I have always remembered that.

You can network your way into new positions using people you have known in the past and also through meeting new people.

You need to get out and meet people. You should go to as many parties and events as you can. You can meet people everywhere. You should get people to talk about themselves, and in doing so, you can learn about new people and become liked by others. The more you ask people about themselves, the more they will appreciate you and want to help you. You also need to appear genuinely interested in them.

When you are looking for a new position, networking with new people is always very important, and can lead to opportunities if you do it right.

I met Chet Holmes and then Anthony Robbins by going to two events where they were. You create opportunities and meet people by getting out of the house.

Many of the most successful business people and entrepreneurs attribute their success to getting out and meeting people and groups to which they belong. You need to join groups and get out. You need to network all you can. It is crucially important to do this, and each new meeting will lead to opportunities.

I credit a lot of my current happiness in life to a networking group I joined years ago. It got me out of the house, introduced me to people, and helped me grow my business and personal life in so many ways through the people I met. I know I would not be where I am now was it not for this group and the people I met along the way. Nothing is more important for your personal and professional development than networking. You cannot do anything on your own--you can try, but it will generally not get you anywhere.

Years ago, I spent time with the founders of a company called Vault. This successful company posts jobs and has reviews of law firms and companies on its site, among other things. I got to know the founders quite well, and then the company was sold for $65,000,000 to a private equity firm.

I forgot about this until a few years later, when the private equity company contacted me about merging Vault into my company and giving me of Vault and $10-million to do so. I did not do this--I should have--but this led to discussions and more introductions that helped me tremendously. These connections all came, again, from me getting out of the house and meeting people. It could have been a life-changing opportunity, and I did not pursue it because I was not smart enough to do so at the time. That said, it would never have happened without networking.

See Also:

* Top 9 Ways For Any Attorney To Generate a Huge Book of Business
* Take Small Actions and Meet Others

Conclusions

Networking can change your career and life. You need to learn the skills to network. You need to become motivated to meet people and find new people to meet. It does not matter who the person is. They may be
able to help you.

My maid's sister had a daughter who recently graduated from college. My maid brought her resume to work one day. She needed a job, so I hired her. I've met people who helped me in my career from diverse connections such as my mechanic. You can find all sorts of jobs through networking. You need to impress everyone you meet because they can help you.