

NETWORKING/INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

WHAT IS NETWORKING?

Networking is the process of making professional contacts to obtain advice, referrals, and information. Networking is something we do all the time without being aware of it. For example, when you relocate into a new community and ask neighbors and friends to recommend a physician, you are networking – making a contact to obtain a referral. Or, when you meet with your professor who teaches labor law to ask about his/her first job working for the National Labor Relations Board and to discuss your interest in working for this organization, you are networking. When you network, you do not ask someone for a job; instead, you ask for information, advice, and referrals. Networking is an ongoing process that does not end when you secure a position. You will continue to rely on your professional network throughout your legal career. Take advantage of the opportunities available to you as a student to begin building your network (for example, the First-Year Mentor Program).

WHY NETWORK?

Referrals

Many positions in small- and medium-size firms are not advertised—networking is the only way to find out about them. When you speak with a contact, you can ask for suggestions about organizations that may have recently gained new clients, hired additional staff, or had staff resign. Your contacts, based on what you have told them about your skills and interests, are often in a position to suggest possible employers. You will have an edge over other candidates if you are referred directly to employers by a contact. Employers place a greater value on a referred candidate because someone has put his or her reputation on the line.

Information and Advice

Many attorneys are willing to provide you with information about legal careers and the marketplace in an informational interview. The “interviewing” is done by you and the information the contact shares with you is usually about his/her area of practice and career path. Ideally, seek out contacts who are working in the area of law that interests you most. These contacts can share information about the market, salary structure, work hours, and typical responsibilities. You can ask for advice about such things as: the best way to tailor your résumé; how to approach employers in certain practices; or how to answer a question about your academic standing.

Once you have made a list of potential contacts, think carefully about what information you want. Do you want information about working in a particular field, the job market in a particular geographical location, or the names of other contacts in a certain area of law?

Sources of Networking:

- *Alumni Finder*, on the School of Law Alumni website, <http://www1.wne.edu/alumni/law/index.cfm>
- Anyone with whom you participate in a volunteer or extracurricular activity
- Family friends
- Members of your place of worship

- Former coworkers or supervisors
- Members of a local bar association practice section
- Professors
- Fellow students or former college classmates
- Sorority or fraternity organizations
- Undergraduate alumni associations
- Continuing Legal Education (CLE) Seminars

Think about how you are going to approach your contact. You can initiate a conversation with some contacts face to face, by picking up the phone (appropriate for those you know well), via email, or by letter. Ask for advice, information, impressions, and potential contacts. Most people like to give advice and share their experiences.

TIPS FOR NETWORKING AT RECEPTIONS AND CONFERENCES

Research Attendees

To the extent possible, obtain information about the people expected to attend so you may target certain people and make the most effective use of your time.

What to Wear

If the event is at a firm, agency, or company right after work, wear business attire. If the event is casual, business casual is appropriate.

What to Bring

Bring resumes in case you are asked for them. Have paper and a pen with you so that you may write down names and telephone numbers of people who do not bring business cards. Bring your business cards.

Introducing Yourself

If you are at a reception after a program, you could say, "Hello. My name is Sally Smith and I am a first-year student at Western New England University School of Law (Note: Do not say WNE.)."

Introducing Others

Present the less senior person to the more senior person. As an example in the law firm context, you would say, "Ms. Senior Partner, may I introduce New Associate."

Arriving at the Event

Arrive on time. If you are arriving alone, thank the host or hostess, get a beverage, wrap the beverage in a napkin, and carry the beverage in your left hand.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

An informational interview is a conversation with a person about his/her job, organization, area of law, and related professional concerns, to determine if that job, organization, or area of law matches your skills, interests, and values. It gives you a chance to learn about the market, identify suitable careers, and generate job leads. You can uncover an unbelievable amount of information about what it is really like in a given practice or law-related field.

When you initiate a contact, be clear, specific, and straightforward about what you want. Specify in a brief email (sent without a resume) that you would like 20-30 minutes of the individual's time, preferably in person, to discuss the nature of his/her practice, job searching strategies, or trends in the local legal community. If someone referred you to this contact, be sure to mention that person. As an example, you could request 20 minutes of a labor attorney's time to talk

about the field of labor law and the particular function of an arbitrator in labor negotiations. You may need to reassure the person that you are not expecting them to help you find a job. (Contacts should not be asked for jobs, but may at times provide referrals if they are in a position to do so.)

Treat the informational interview like any other interview in terms of preparation and interview etiquette. Dress appropriately and bring with you the application materials you would normally bring to a job interview, such as your résumé, transcript, list of references, and writing sample, in case you are asked for copies. Whenever you are in a work-related situation, but particularly when you are looking for a job, you are selling yourself and your qualifications, including your expertise, self-assurance, command of situations, and other qualities, to everyone with whom you speak. The person to whom you speak may not be hiring then, but he/she may decide to do so in the future, or may later speak to someone else who is hiring. If you have favorably impressed your contact, you may be called back for an actual job interview or recommended to another employer for consideration.

After your conversation, send a typed thank-you letter or email. Periodically update your network on your progress and let them know when you find a position. Keep records of the people you contact, the letters and other materials you gave to them, the dates on which you met with or spoke to someone, and what kind of follow-up you did.

SAMPLE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- How did you get started in this field?
- What do you like most about it?
- Where do you think the new trends/issues will be in this area of law?
- How do you spend your time on a daily or weekly basis?
- What types of challenges do you encounter?
- What makes someone successful in this field/at this firm?
- Is there anything you would like to change about your job?
- Are there any lifestyle considerations of which I should be aware?
- What advice would you give to a law student who wants to enter this field?
- Is there someone else with whom you think I should talk? May I use your name when contacting him/her?