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## Network Your Way to the Career You Want

By Carol Schiro Greenwald

**P**aul Hardworker is a third-year litigation associate at an AmLaw 250 firm. Tired of the hours and a bit bored with the work he wants to move to a smaller firm where he can have more independence and a more varied caseload. He knows that “the best” jobs are filled through word of mouth, so he wants to network but doesn’t know where to begin.

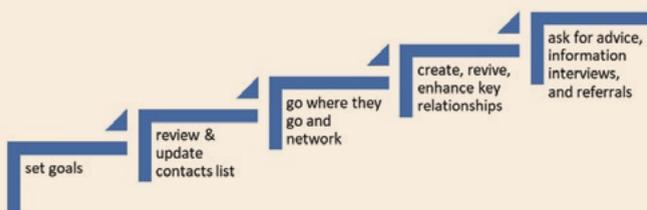
Many people can relate to this scenario. In this article we will help him and everyone who is intimidated by the number of networking choices and a limited amount of free time.

### YOU NEED STRATEGIC NETWORKING

Strategic networking is a goal-driven process for creating personal relationships that helps individuals achieve economic, social and emotional ends. Strategic refers to intention, the networker’s intention to create and implement a thought-out set of cumulative activities that lead toward a goal.

There are five stages to this process as outlined below. Taken together, the five steps help you create a detailed, focused set of goals that can be attained through a series of purposeful, cumulative networking activities with a minimum of false starts and wasted time.

### DIAGRAM 1. THE FIVE STAGES OF THE STRATEGIC NETWORKING FOR CAREERS PROCESS.



### GOALSETTING

Begin the process by asking yourself some hard questions. This is probably the most important part of the

process because it influences the rest of the strategy, so take your time and answer honestly.

- **Work:** Why do you want to change jobs? What aspects of your current position do you want to change, and what aspects would you like to have in the next job? What are the key characteristics of the job you are looking for?
- **Longer-term aspirations:** Where do you want to be in 10 years? What kind of work life will you have? Where do you want to live? How do you want to live? What kind of work-life balance do you want to achieve?
- **Connections:** Whom do you know who currently works in the kind of position you want to have? Whom do you know who could refer you to such people? Who would be willing to do an information interview with you? Are these people already in your contact list?
- **Where do your desired connections go?** What groups do they belong to? Where do they go for information? How will you meld online and in-person networking activities?
- **What kind of networking do you like to do?** Where do you feel most comfortable? Do you prefer small groups and educational situations or large parties and fun events?

Use the answers to these questions to create one or two specific goals. Not, “I want to be rich”; rather, “I want to be an equity partner in a small to medium size firm litigating interesting cases.”

### REORIENT YOUR CONTACT LIST

You probably have a contact list that includes your closest friends and family, college friends, college professors and mentors, law school friends and mentors, and colleagues from your various work experiences. You will need to expand this list in two directions:

- **Broaden** your list: Create a brain-builder addition to your network that will include people you respect



whose ideas intrigue you or who are experts in areas that interest you.

- > Add thought leaders, futurists, industry gurus, authors, artists, etc. who you find through articles or blogs, seminars, work, networking activities, free time activities.
- *Deepen* the categories you have already: Add client contacts, other professionals who work with your clients, your own personal doctor, accountant, IT professional, members of your community, social, religious and school-centered groups, etc.
  - > Look through your alumni lists to find people now working for places that interest you or who are doing the kind of work you want to do.
- Use LinkedIn to identify friends of your friends that you would like to meet. Then ask for introductions.

## GO WHERE THEY GO

Now that you have one or two specific goals and an enhanced contacts list, the next step is to identify 10 to 20 people you would like to meet. Research them using LinkedIn and Google Search to identify their interests, work history, contacts and places where they network.

Some of them you can meet in person by sending them an invite through LinkedIn. You can also research the groups they belong to and select one or two to try out.

Most in-person groups allow potential members one or two free visits. You want to join a group where you will feel comfortable, so it is important to “test the waters” before you jump in.

Two types of groups may be especially useful:

- *Local mixed membership business people and professionals:* These groups typically meet monthly, sometimes more frequently, to discuss various topics of interest. Usually there is networking free time before and after meetings; time to make one-on-one plans with members.
- *Local single profession groups:* For lawyers these include bar associations and local membership groups.
  - > In bar associations, consider attending meetings in areas outside your expertise to learn more about the issues, interests and kind of work in other areas of law. Many local bars have social events where you can meet a wide variety of



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people. Attend those that feature an activity that interests you, such as scotch tasting or bowling.

- > Local single profession lawyer groups usually have members representing different areas of law and/or places to practice law. Usually each slot is represented by one person. For lawyers in boutique firms these groups provide resources for their clients and avenues for them to keep up with the latest news in other areas of law.

## BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Now create an activities plan that includes, if possible, several activities each month, where you will be surrounded by people who can help you build the career you want. Set time aside for breakfast, lunch or coffee one-on-ones for in-depth conversations about possible workplaces, companies, firms, and next steps for moving forward.

Diagram 2 illustrates an implementation sequence for activities:

- First, use online and in-person research to select the handful of people you want to meet at any time. More than a handful becomes unmanageable, because you will want to build strong, trust-based friendships with these individuals and this requires repeat meetings or interactions over time.

## DIAGRAM 2. THE CAREER NETWORKING PATH



- After selecting the people to focus on, select the venues where you plan to meet them. One way to determine if they too will be at an event is to connect with them ahead of time, ask if they will be there and suggest spending some time together.
  - Go to these activities with the intention of talking with people who can help your career search.
  - Prepare a personal “agenda” ahead of time with questions you want to ask, topics you can talk about, and a statement as to what you want to accomplish from this activity. Keep in mind how each endeavor moves your career search forward.
  - Plan how you will ask for advice, information interviews or referrals. Working it out in your mind ahead of time contributes to a sense of security and feeling of control.
  - Your sense of purpose and roadmap to achievement create confidence that will, in turn, be reflected in your body language and bearing. You will look and feel like the professional you are and you want to be.

## PULLING IT TOGETHER

This process can be repeated as many times as you want with as many goals as you want. Always seek to grow your network, balancing strong relationships among best friends and family with weaker relationships with weaker links, acquaintances in your work world, and aspirational leaders. Such a network continually offers currently relevant information and thought-provoking knowledge – a strong basis for career growth.

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