

## Networking and Informational Interviewing

### *What is networking?*

Networking is the process of establishing professional contacts and cultivating relationships. Networking can provide you with access to opportunities not advertised through traditional means.

### *How do I network?*

- Develop a List of Direct and Indirect Contacts - ask relatives, friends, alumni, professors, bar association members and other contacts for information and advice.
- Do Not Ask for a Job - if they don't have a position for you, then your conversation ends and you lose an opportunity to gain valuable information now and in the future when a job may exist.
- Ask for Information - learn about them, their firm/organization, their field of law, how they became successful, how they found their job, sources of information and job listings that they use, where to find out more about their firm and their field(s), what they like and don't like about their work and what you should do now to get into the field in the future. They may even provide you with additional names of other professionals or let you know if they hear of an opening.

### *Who are my networking contacts?*

Family, friends, professors, alumni, Career Planning, former employees, and organization members are all potential contacts. A non-comprehensive list is contained in the subsection titled "Networking Contacts" that follows. Now, you may think ". . . they won't have time . . . they don't know me . . . they are too senior . . .", but these are just common misconceptions that often lead to more excuses for not networking. Ask yourself: have you ever been called by someone who was a friend of a friend who was thinking of applying to your college, or was interested in moving to your city? Were you willing to give them advice about the school, the geographic location, the teachers, the things to avoid? You probably felt good because you helped someone else make an informed decision about their options. You may even have assisted them in getting that apartment because you knew some people who had to break their lease. Helping someone else and perhaps assisting them in pursuing a similar career makes most people feel good about themselves. The more common bonds and connections there are between you and the person who you contact, the more likely they will be willing to help you.

### *What do I ask my contacts?*

**Ask for information and advice, not for a job.** If you ask for a job and that person does not know of any openings, they probably will not meet with you because they don't have what you want. If you ask for information and advice regardless of them knowing of available positions, however, you may learn about the firms, the geographic areas, the ins and outs of practicing in a specific area of the law, and resources to assist you in your job search. You may also have gained a contact or mentor with inside information on future openings. These future openings may never make it to the advertised sources of job leads. Even if you just get advice that helps you make a decision about your career or job search, that is information you would not have had if you had asked for a position.

### **Networking Contacts**

Think of everyone you know. They do not have to be in the field or firm that you want to explore at this point. After all, each person who you know will have contacts of their own, and those contacts may be able to help you in your job search. Consider the following potential sources of networking contacts:

Family

Friends (or friends of friends)  
Neighbors  
Co-workers at prior jobs  
Co-workers at current job or internship  
Judges  
Law school professors  
Law school students  
School activity members  
College or graduate school acquaintances  
Sorority or fraternity members  
Alumni associations  
Career Planning offices  
Community organizations  
Religious groups  
Hobby groups  
Professional associations  
Customers or clients  
Armed Forces personnel  
Professionals (doctors, accountants, bankers,  
insurance agents, stock brokers)  
Intramural sports teammates or fellow health club members  
Counselors or advisors

### **Sample Informational Interview/Networking Questions**

The following is a list of sample questions that will give you an idea of what areas may be discussed in an informational interview. Obviously, this list should be adapted to your own specific situation and needs. You may want to ask some of these questions in a more conversational manner appropriate to your meetings, and we do not suggest that you should ask them exactly as written here. Also, we do not mean to imply that this list is comprehensive or exhaustive of the types of questions you can or should ask, and you are strongly encouraged to use additional resources to prepare for your informational interview.

#### **PREPARATION:**

1. What law school courses, special skills or experiences are required or recommended for entry into this field or area of the law?
2. How did you prepare yourself for the work you currently do?

#### **PRESENT JOB:**

1. How do you spend your time during a typical work week?
2. What skills or abilities are essential to succeed in your job?
3. What are the toughest problems you face?
4. What do you find most rewarding about the work itself?
5. If you were ever to leave your job, what would cause you to leave?

#### **CAREER FUTURE:**

1. If things develop as you would like, what direction would your career take?
2. If you needed to leave your position suddenly, what different kinds of work would you pursue?

3. Is your present legal area growing? How would you describe or estimate future prospects?

#### LIFE STYLE:

1. What obligations does your work place upon you outside of the standard work week?
2. How much flexibility do you have in terms of controlling your schedule, dress or vacation schedule?

#### GENERAL ADVICE:

1. Would you give me feedback on the effectiveness of my resume for this sort of position?
2. Based on my resume and what I have told you, how well suited am I for the work you do?
3. What kind of experiences, paid or volunteer, would you recommend to me?
4. If you were a law student again what would you do differently?

#### HIRING DECISIONS:

1. What are the factors that would influence you in your decision to hire someone for your firm and why?
  - a. Law school academic record?
  - b. Membership on law journal?
  - c. Moot court involvement?
  - d. Past work or volunteer experience?
  - e. Undergraduate record?
  - f. Specific knowledge, skills or talents?
  - g. Knowledge of your organization, department, area of practice?

#### REFERRAL

1. Based on our conversation today, can you recommend other people who I should contact?
2. May I use your name when I contact other individuals?

#### MISCELLANEOUS:

1. How do people find out about actual job openings in this area? Are they advertised, and if so, where? Is information spread by word-of-mouth, and if so, who spreads the word? Are positions posted in law school career planning offices?
2. What is the turnover rate (at a firm)?
3. How much lateral mobility exists in this area of the law?