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Networking For Attorneys and Other Humans

Chances are, you already know how to network.

When you enlist the help of friends to

- track down a suitable restaurant for an outing you're planning,
- suggest volunteers for a charitable project, or
- find a babysitter,

you are using the same skills you need to network in business. These are basic skills we, as human beings, already use to navigate our complicated lives.

So, whether you're a new partner and need to begin bringing in business, a hard-working associate who needs business to make partner, or a solo practitioner who wants to increase or upgrade your practice -- you can capitalize on the same *human* skills you've been using in your personal life.

Networking for business requires some planning. That means setting some goals, and then creating a schedule that let's you measure your progress as the months go by.

Here are three basic principles to get you started on your own networking in a systematic and natural way.

1. Set Goals

Just a few days ago, a friend who was looking for a job told me colleagues and family were setting him up with their contacts for informational interviews and

referrals to possible employers. But my friend didn't know what kind of job he wanted. So those discussions had no focus. I suggested he first crystallize his goals - - so he could give each contact a clear idea of the help he wanted.

His story's still unfolding, but he now has a list of four, specific objectives to work toward. In other words, he now has a tool to focus his interviews. And when we spoke yesterday about an upcoming meeting, I heard something different in his voice: confidence.

Before you go to a networking event, know why you're going. What are *your* goals? Whom do *you* need to meet?

2. It's Not Just About You

When I started coaching, I did a lot of networking for my own business. What I soon learned was that I didn't need to talk much about me to get business.

Here's an experience I had that drove the point home. At a trade-association meeting, I met a financial professional who worked on contract as a chief financial officer. I decided to find out about her business -- and about whom she needed to meet to get new clients.

I asked questions like

- Is there a particular industry in which you prefer to work?
- Who in the company usually makes the decision to retain you?

- When you've secured business in the past, what kind of people have been your sources of referrals?

Then, at the same event, I met a chief operating officer who also worked on contract. I asked him the same types of questions -- and one more: did he ever find himself in companies that needed a CFO?

It turns out he did. So I introduced the CFO to the COO. She got new projects. By helping his clients find someone they needed he increased his own value to his clients.

But that's not the end of the story. To my pleasant surprise, both of them asked me what I was looking for. One of them became my client -- and the other referred several new contacts to me.

By following your natural curiosity, you can learn how you can help both people you meet and people you already know. Focus on how *you* can be a resource for them. Along the way, help them understand what you're looking for, so they can be a resource for you.

3. Get Out of the Office, and Go Build Your Network

By definition, a network requires people. If you want the benefits of having an extensive array of valuable contacts, but don't yet have a network in place, you're going to need to develop some more relationships. That means getting out -- and meeting people. Your local and state bar associations are good if you want to meet other lawyers. If you want to meet new sources of referral or potential clients, go where they go. Become active in a trade association. Or do a project with a Chamber of Commerce.

Then, when you attend events these organizations hold, *remember*: many people often show up because they're looking for new contacts too.

So, instead of standing around with your friends at these events, ask your friends to introduce you to the kinds of people you want to meet. And offer to introduce them to the kinds of people they want to meet. Then, take leave of your friends, and go meet people.

One last point: some of my clients have told me meeting people and exchanging business cards reminds them of dating. Did you ever have a date end with the other person saying, "I'll call you"?

And the call never comes?

People do that in business all the time. Often, it's not an intentional brush off. But it feels like one.

So, if you're on the receiving end -- your new contacts say they'll call and they don't -- take charge. Phone them.

And if you're the one who said you'd phone, follow through. Demonstrate, at the beginning of this new relationship, that you're a reliable contact. Doing what you say you're going to do builds trust -- and valuable relationships.

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