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# *IN SIGHT* for Oregon Lawyers and Judges

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

## NETWORKING FOR INTROVERTS

Networking is to business what exercise is to health: while everyone agrees it's essential, it is something that people frequently avoid, are uncomfortable with, or feel that they can't do well – if at all!

Many people say, "Networking comes naturally to outgoing, chatty types, but not me. I'm quiet, and I feel anxious in large gatherings or meeting new people. I'll never be able to walk up to strangers and start talking about myself." If you find yourself agreeing with all or part of that statement, don't feel like you'll never be able to enjoy the benefits of networking. Follow a few of these suggestions, and with a small effort you may be surprised at the results.

### Realize That You're Not Alone!

While some people embody Will Rogers' philosophy that "A stranger is just a friend I haven't met yet," the rest of us experience varying degrees of unease when meeting new people. One step to conquering anxiety is to realize that other people might also be uncomfortable and to take ourselves less seriously. Don't feel that you have to apologize for taking up someone's time. Ideally, you'll be listening more than you are talking, and most people like to talk about their work or their interests.

If your networking goal is career-related, remember that most successful people got help along the way. You are giving people an opportunity to feel good by helping you – even if it's only for a 20-minute informational interview. Everyone begins his or her journey at the starting line.

### Start Small

Don't wear yourself out when you begin your networking. Set a modest, achievable goal, like going to a local group that meets monthly. (Often these meetings include helpful self-introductions.) The next month, you might decide to chat with one or two people.

If that seems too daunting, practice on familiar territory: talk to your friends and family members. You may be surprised at the contacts they have or what you learn when you strike up a conversation about their backgrounds and interests.

If you still feel intimidated about starting a conversation with someone you don't know, recruit a friend to attend an event with you. If he or she is more outgoing, have your friend introduce you to a few people, and then try meeting some others on your own. If your friend is more reserved, circulate independently for 20 minutes, and then regroup. Either way, the buddy system can initially be more comfortable than striking out on your own, and having someone around for support makes it more likely that you'll stick to your goal.

### Work From Your Strengths

At times you won't be in your comfort zone, but always be aware of your particular strengths. Many people who are uncomfortable in large gatherings do well when talking with one person. Shy people frequently learn that one way to avoid talking about themselves is to ask other people questions. Approach people who are standing alone – they might be feeling awkward, too!

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Break the ice by asking a simple question, like “Where did you get your coffee? I didn’t see any when I came in,” or comment on the surroundings: “This is a great room – I’ve never been in this building before.” Simple comments can lead to a longer conversation.

Practice networking skills at events you enjoy. You’ll be more motivated to attend, and it will be easier to talk with people about the topic.

### Tried-and-True Techniques

You may have received some of the best advice about meeting new people on your first day of grade school: get there early, stand up straight, look people in the eye, and have a purpose.

Dale Carnegie, who authored the classic *How to Make Friends and Influence People*, provided these timeless tips: Don’t forget to smile – it helps you relax and puts other people at ease. Keep your business cards handy, and ask others for their cards. Make a note of how you met the person and his or her area of interest, so you can follow up effectively. Use the person’s name in conversation. It makes the conversation more personal, and it helps you remember them.

### Be Prepared!

Experienced athletes warm up and prepare before their events, and the same drill applies to networking. Have a few conversational icebreakers in your repertoire before attending a meeting or event. These should be simple questions that require more than a “yes” or “no” answer. “What kind of work do you do?” “How did you get into that field?” “What do you like most about your job (or your area of practice)?” “What do you find most challenging?” “What would make your job easier?” “What would you change if you could?” are all good conversation starters.

These types of open-ended questions are also the basis of a great informational interview, with a few additions. At the end of an informational interview, always thank the person for spending time to talk with you and ask if he or she can suggest anyone else who might be helpful for you to meet. If so, ask permission to use the interviewee’s name when you introduce yourself to his or her contact.

Before entering into the networking arena, hone your “elevator speech” – a catchy, one-minute introduction. Here’s a suggested formula for a memorable

elevator speech: I/We + Help + (Target Market) + (Benefit). For example, “I help companies protect and defend their intellectual property assets.” If you’re not among other lawyers, make your introduction easy for a non-lawyer to follow: “I’m a criminal defense attorney who represents people accused of a DUI.” Use natural language, and practice it until it becomes second nature. In time, you can add one more element: what makes you unique.

Be prepared with responses for questions that might not have a simple answer, particularly if you are in a career transition. If you’re currently out of work, consider whether you want to share that information with new contacts up front. It can be helpful to have your network of existing contacts know that you are actively looking for work, but you might not want to lead with that when meeting someone for the first time. If you are currently employed but looking at other opportunities, have a response ready for the person who says, “Hey, what are you doing here? You’re not looking to leave your firm, are you?”

### If All Else Fails . . .

If you try some of these suggestions and feel like you’ll never be comfortable with networking, don’t give up! Try a structured networking group that helps its members to build business through word-of-mouth referrals. (Be mindful of ethics rules prohibiting lawyers from giving or receiving reciprocal referrals. Also be aware of the ethics rules governing personal follow-up on referrals.) Don’t forget your college and law school alumni associations, which provide access to preexisting connections as well as networking groups based on ethnicity, gender, or special interests.

E-mail can be a good supplement to in-person “meet and greet,” allowing you to get in touch with lawyers who were mentioned in the news or who authored articles on a specific topic. Meeting someone for coffee can frequently be more productive than mingling at a cocktail party or large dinner event. Don’t neglect the world of social networking sites, either. Try LinkedIn ([www.Linkedin.com](http://www.Linkedin.com)) for direct business networking, and consider starting a blog or using Twitter ([www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)) as a marketing tool.

### Finally

Analyze your results: Which techniques worked for you? Which ones were unproductive? Remember

to pace yourself. Getting out of your comfort zone can be challenging, but long-term success is attained by gradual changes over time. Doing too much too soon can lead to burnout.

Remember to follow up with the people you meet. The key to successful networking isn't merely making a lot of contacts; it is developing those contacts into mutually beneficial relationships that will provide rewards over a career lifetime.

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### Four Great Books on Networking

- Marti Olsen Laney, PsyD, *The Introvert Advantage: How to Thrive in an Extrovert World* (Workman Publishing Co.: 2002)
- Harvey Mackay, *Dig Your Well Before You're Thirsty: The Only Networking Book You'll Ever Need* (Currency Books: 1999)
- Jay Conrad Levinson and Monroe Mann, *Guerrilla Networking: A Proven Battle Plan to Attract the Very People You Want to Meet* (AuthorHouse: 2009)
- Diane Darling, *The Networking Survival Guide: Get the Success You Want by Tapping Into the People You Know* (McGraw-Hill: 2003)