

Keys to Success

Professional Development Tips for Young Lawyers

By David J. Oberly



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Organizational Networking

In order to develop a complete network and maximize relationship-building efforts, young attorneys must complement their individual networking efforts with targeted, focused organizational networking activities. Organizational membership and involvement is an extremely effective way to get out into the public eye and, more importantly, in front of those individuals who may be in need of legal services, or who otherwise know people who have such a need.

For young attorneys, many options are at your fingertips, such as alumni groups, bar associations, chambers of commerce, local industry and trade organizations, young professionals' organizations, charitable organizations, nonprofits, and women's and minority groups. However, you need to be strategic in your organizational networking, focusing your efforts on organizations that will produce tangible business development benefits.

When it comes to organizational involvement, do not spread yourself too thin. Rather, be selective by joining only those most important key organizations that will yield the greatest results for both your individual practice, as well as your marketing and business development objectives. Most importantly, do not just join an organization – become as active as possible in the group. Being involved will allow you to meet people and broaden your network of contacts. As such, take the time to plan your level of involvement, and make a concerted effort to devote yourself to these efforts. For example, if your local bar association hosts monthly Young Lawyers Section meetings during lunchtime, make the commitment now and mark your calendar to attend these events.

In addition to being visible in the organization, you can also utilize your knowledge and talents to make a tangible, significant, and valuable contribution to the organization. For example, for a local bar association, you can volunteer to plan and organize events and activities for the Young Lawyers Section, or offer to conduct a CLE presentation for members. Becoming involved and making a contribution will produce significant benefits and get you much closer to your business development goals, as taking an active role within the organization will help you gain notoriety and recognition as an expert and leader within that organization.

Ideally, in addition to making a contribution, you should strive to serve in a leadership capacity in these organizations as well. To facilitate this objective, young attorneys should seek to become active on committees, with the goal of securing a position in the organization's executive leadership ranks. For example, for

a local bar association, you can obtain a position as the chair of a committee of the bar's Young Lawyers Section, with the ultimate goal of later securing a spot on the Young Lawyers Section's executive board.

There are myriad of different types of organizations that you can join to bolster your organizational networking efforts. First, look at your potential options in terms of bar associations that you can join, or of which you are already a member. If you have more of a local practice, keep your bar association memberships local. Conversely, if your practice is more regional or national in scope, look to larger associations, such as the American Bar Association. You can also join committees or practice groups that focus more narrowly on specific practice areas. Finally, make sure to join the young professionals section or division of any bar association of which you are a member, which exist in conjunction with almost every local and national bar association in operation today.

In addition, you can also look to local industry and trade organizations which are relevant to your current individual legal practice and/or the practice that you wish to develop. For example, you can join a trade association where potential clients are also members. If you are proactive with trade association membership, you can find a variety of opportunities that will allow you to connect with people who work within that given industry, many of whom are in regular need of legal services.

Finally, you can also join community groups or organizations that are completely divorced from any professional activities, which will allow you to meet more of your peers from other industries that are similar to you in age. For example, look to join a charitable or nonprofit organization that is well aligned with a cause that you are passionate about.

All young attorneys must make a concerted effort to become involved in outside organizations in order to fully maximize their potential of originating new clients and business on a consistent basis. Ideally, in addition to active participation, young attorneys should also strive to obtain leadership roles in the organizations of which they are a member. Done right, organizational involvement can be leveraged effectively to operate as a key generator of new clients and business for young attorneys on a long-term basis.

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