



Networking in Law

Networking sessions can be a daunting experience, especially for junior undergraduates. You may find that imposter syndrome overwhelms you to a point where you feel uncomfortable interacting, or that you gravitate towards your friends and huddles of students, or that you're just bored and want to leave. These feelings or actions aren't uncommon amongst students, but they do impede one's ability to get the most out of networking. Effective networking is important since it can open doors that you had not previously considered walking through. It can help you land a graduate job without you even realising. This document details common networking scenarios in commercial law and how a student can get the most out of them.

Networking events

Law firm networking events are an excellent way to meet and learn from practicing professionals. Whether the firm representatives are a mixed bag, or full of trainees, connecting and conversing with these lawyers will teach you something valuable on your road to becoming a lawyer. As the session starts, try not to follow the herd of students all surrounding the rainmaking private equity partner. Play the field. Converse with someone who may be standing by themselves. You can learn a lot more from a one-on-one interaction than a ten-on-one. Start by smiling, ensuring your right hand is free for a handshake, and introducing yourself. Your name, your university and a nice to meet you will suffice. They'll introduce themselves, then you can fire away with questions. The initial interaction is so important because a first impression lasts. If you have a drink in one hand and food in the other when you walk up to someone, that's not a great first impression. Walk up with one or the other, or neither, and ensure you have at least one stock question to ask before you converse. From there, the conversation can flow naturally.

Examples of starting questions are as follows: What was your route into x firm? How long have you been at x firm? Could you please tell me what your day to day consists of in your department?

Once you've gained a bit of confidence and had an interesting conversation, it's time to move onto the next. Ask politely for their business card or their LinkedIn and let them know that it was nice meeting them. You want to meet as many people as possible so try and keep conversations to around 10-15 minutes.

Virtual networking events

Since the newest 'normal' is here to stay, we must embrace it. Virtual networking events can be extremely difficult to manoeuvre, but done correctly, can be just as effective. Since many if not most students will have their microphones muted and cameras off, this is your chance to stand out. Keep your camera on so that when you ask a question, you can be recognised. If you're in a breakout room, the one-to-one interaction can be just as effective. Be sure to give others the opportunity to ask questions, but if there are any awkward silences, don't be afraid to break them. Come loaded with questions in a breakout room networking session as you will be able to get a lot more

answered. You want to be remembered as the personable student with good energy so do not be afraid to engage in some appropriate banter with the lawyers if the situation permits.

Networking on social media

To be an effective online networker, you need to persevere and have your expectations managed. Our interconnected world now means anyone can contact you at any time, which funnily enough doesn't translate into speedier replies. If one lawyer from a firm doesn't reply, this shouldn't stop you messaging another from the same firm. If this lawyer doesn't reply, the same applies. People use social media to varying degrees and it is all too easy to acknowledge a message and forget to reply. The key is to not take this personally and keep on trying until you get the information you are after.

When sending connect requests on LinkedIn, consider sending a message along with the request. This way professionals know what you are hoping to get out of this exchange, and may be more inclined to help you. Regarding LinkedIn generally, try and have an active profile. This means posting at least once a month and updating your network on your journey. If you recently completed an internship, talk about it. If you read an interesting article and want to share your take on it, post it. Just be wary of the content that you put out there. There is often a pressure to post similar things to what the 'corporate crowd' of students post, but don't succumb to this. Share big or small milestones you achieve on your road to becoming a commercial law. Try not to post things that would be seen as spam to the vast majority of your network.

Keeping in contact

So you met a lawyer at a virtual or in-person networking event. You guys hit it off, exchange details, as well as some bants. What now?

Now comes the hard part; maintaining the relationship. Your goal is to develop a mentee-mentor relationship such that if the situation arises, this person can give you a glowing review. Do remember though, this is not all about you. If you gel with the person, they can even become a friend to you. Someone senior who can help you manoeuvre through your junior years and you can repay them when the time comes. Despite this, there are ways for you to benefit them as a student. Most lawyers enjoy talking about their job, so don't be afraid to ask them all about it. If someone is on a roll talking about themselves, chances are they won't want to stop. Thus we advise that you don't keep it all strictly business, otherwise it can come off too transactional. Don't be afraid to ask them more personal questions, within reason. You can ask them about university, how they balance work & family life, or how they like to spend their downtime from the office.

Conversating about all these things as well as the work would allow the mentor to really enjoy these interactions, and allow you to build a good rapport with them. When starting an interaction with a lawyer you know, you can begin by updating them on your career journey. Starting a conversation with them every six months gives you enough time to accomplish things in the interim, and allows the mentor to not feel spammed. If you're struggling to remember all the relationships you'd like to maintain, make a list. When it comes to application season, having people provide an insight into applying to their firm is invaluable information. To acquire this, you have to build your network.

Conclusion

Remember: the above tips are...just tips. This method works for our mentees, worked for us, and worked for our mentors before us. Don't be afraid to remix these tips according to your style. There is no 'right' way to network, but following the above will make you a pretty effective networker.