

## Interview on Networking, appearing on Above the Law January 13, 2010

This week, we spoke with Jordan Abshire, Managing Director at Lateral Link who works with partner and associate candidates on law firm and in-house searches in Washington D.C and the Southeast. We asked Jordan for advice on networking – what it is, how it works, and why you need to do it even if you are not actively looking for a new job.

If the economic downturn has taught attorneys anything, it is that meeting the annual billable hours requirement no longer guarantees any kind of real job security. Networking is more crucial than ever for attorneys who want to stay in control of their career development.

Q: Why do so many people cringe when they think about networking?

A: Too many people think that networking is something mystical and that they need to have a particular skill set or personality type to be successful. But 95% of networking is just showing up and greeting the person to your left and to your right – whether it is a bar association event, a CLE class, or an alumni cocktail hour. If you can do that, you can network. You don't have to woo the most important person at the event or go home with 20 business cards to be successful.

Q: Okay, so I showed up to an event. What do I do next?

A: If you go to an event alone, grab a nametag and approach someone else who is standing alone – and introduce yourself. Or head over to the food or drink area, where people are usually milling about, and join a conversation. People attend these events to meet other people, so no one will think you are crazy for approaching them. There's a good chance if you introduce yourself to one person, they will know other people at the event who they can introduce you to, making subsequent introductions even easier.

Q: But shouldn't I try to meet the speakers or other important people at the event?

A: The great thing about networking is that you never know whom you might meet or how that person might help you down the road. If you are looking over someone's shoulder for the next most important person in the room, the person you are talking to will sense that. Be sincere when you meet people and avoid evaluating them on how useful you think they might be. Introduce yourself to the speaker if you want to, but don't get so caught up that you forget to reach out to the potential connections standing right next to you.

Q: Someone I met at an event contacted me and asked me to help them. I doubt this person would ever be in a position to help me, so should I bother?

A: If someone connects with you after a networking event, try to help them, even if there is no apparent benefit for you. In fact, if someone asks you for a favor, do the favor and more if you can. For example, if someone asks you for the name of a contact, don't just pass along the name; offer to introduce them. Often, the benefits of networking are long-term: if you do a good turn for someone, they will almost always remember you down the road and might be able to help you out in ways you

can't foresee. Make a habit of introducing people to each other; it gives them the impression that you "know everyone."

Q: What are some other basic networking tools?

A: An easy way to begin networking is to join a professional networking site like LinkedIn. It is a great way to connect with people. Even if you are currently unemployed, you can join LinkedIn – just upload your past employment and note that you are currently seeking another opportunity. But getting online is just the first step. You need to get out into the world and attend events. Events like bar association meetings or CLE classes are a good place to start, but you can just as easily network at undergraduate and law school alumni happy hours, community-related groups, or even art exhibits, sporting events, or other activities that interest you.

After you meet someone at a real world event, use LinkedIn to follow-up with them and keep the communication lines open for the future. Another great way to connect with people in a non-business environment is to join a volunteer organization or charity, where you can meet people away from the pressure of official job duties. And don't forget to utilize your law school or undergraduate career services resources. Most schools keep databases of alumni who are willing to talk with other alumni about their companies or provide other career advice.

Q: This sounds like a lot to do. Shouldn't I just wait to start networking until I want to find a new job?

A: No, you should not wait until you're under pressure to find a new job to start networking. None of the suggestions discussed above are particularly difficult, so if you make a little time for them, you will soon find that you have created a sizeable network of connections. Then, when you are actively looking for a new job, you won't find yourself in the awkward situation of introducing yourself to someone in the same breath that you are asking for a job. Instead, you can reach out to people with whom you have established relationships, making it much easier to ask for their assistance.