

Five tips for better holiday networking

by Carolyn Lavin (Published: December 2nd, 2010)



Holiday parties are plentiful for lawyers, even if some have been scaled back to reflect challenging economic times. Whether you are invited to your own firm's glittering bash, a client's holiday open house or a referral source's holiday breakfast, take a few minutes to think about how to turn holiday cheer into new business.

Lawyers know that networking is all about synergy and giving — enhancing business for yourself and others by bringing talents and skills to the table that are otherwise missing.

While some see networking as a buffet where they start with an empty plate and hope to walk away with an abundance (of leads, of fee-generating hours), effective networking should be more like a potluck supper, where everyone shares in the harvest.

Be strategic

Unless you're a politician, you don't have to meet everyone in the room to be successful. Instead, try to connect with a handful of people in a meaningful way. Look for those with whom you may have business synergy.

Holiday gatherings often open the door to meeting people beyond your conventional lawyer and social circles. While lawyers sometimes shy away from networking with other lawyers and bar association functions, meeting the opposing counsel from a recent case who was impressed by your legal acumen may result in future referrals.

Do your homework

Know what you are getting into, in terms of setting, attendees, speakers and format. Are you one of many people invited from your firm to this holiday get-together or the sole representative?

Adopt a positive attitude; people can sense if you are feeling friendly and open to their messages. Rehearse your own 30-second commercial. Remember to focus on the benefits of your firm and problem-solving scenarios, not only your personal curriculum vitae.

Focus on non-verbal communication

Non-verbal cues convey attitude, understanding, empathy, ethics and passion. Success in business is often based on the ability to communicate. Eye contact is the barometer of communications. If you want to know if people are truly listening to you, look into their eyes. Adding a smile and eye contact to a handshake is the ultimate in communication. Your non-verbal communication is also revealed in your attire, so be sure to dress up if you know that your host is decking the halls.

Connect with attendees

Initiate handshakes and repeat the name of the person you meet. Listen first, talk later.

Ask questions; people love to talk about themselves. Connecting with fellow revelers is all about building relationships based on common ground and mutual need. Since the line between our business and personal lives is often blurry, look for synergy at every turn. Ask what others are doing for the holidays, where they went to law school or what trends business clients are seeing in the economy. Remember, people like to do business with people they like.

Follow up

The key to turning a positive networking conversation into an actual fee-generating client, hot prospect or dynamic referral source is follow-up. Merely making a simple follow-up gesture — via e-mails, hand-written notes or phone calls — says good things about you and your firm.

During the holidays, we are inundated by cheerful greetings in a variety of forms, from the traditional card to mass e-mail blasts. Look for ways to make your follow-up stand out. You might send an article of interest, offer to make an introduction to a potential client or customer, or alert your newfound friend to another networking event — all where you have no immediate opportunity for gain.

Business networking, especially during the holidays, is certainly analogous to the spirit of giving.

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