



# The Art of Networking

## At a glance:



**Identify your network:** Determine your existing connections, including colleagues, former classmates, and friends, to identify potential contacts who can support you in your endeavors.



**Expand your network:** Attend industry events, reconnect with school alumni, join professional organizations, and utilize LinkedIn to grow your network.



**Engage and maintain connections:** Build meaningful relationships by catching up with colleagues, offering help, setting up informational interviews, and following up with new contacts.



**Approach with curiosity:** Networking is about learning and relationship-building. A thoughtful, reciprocal approach makes networking more effective and authentic.

## Step 1: Identify your network

Whether you are an experienced attorney or early in your legal career, mapping your professional network allows you to identify all of the people you already know and have connections with. It can also help you determine an initial cohort of whom you may want to contact and who may be able to connect you to someone else.

The [Networking Strategic Plan worksheet](#) is one easy approach for mapping your network. As you are mapping, think about people from your youth, high school, college, grad school, and law school. Also map the jobs you have had and people you have worked with in those jobs.

## Step 2: Grow your network

After mapping out the contacts whom you already know, think about whom you would like to know. Make a game plan for broadening your network. Be intentional in adding the right contacts to your network. Below are some ideas for how to expand your professional network.

### 1. ATTEND INDUSTRY EVENTS

Attending events and conferences is a simple way to meet professionals in your field. Check with your law school, bar association, and employer to find relevant events you may be able to attend. Consider also attending CLEs in person to make additional connections.

Attending is just the first step. Be prepared to make conversation. While it can be intimidating to approach people you don't know, the more you practice, the easier it becomes. Preparing ahead of time or practicing your elevator pitch can help overcome any nervousness.

Eventually, you will want to speak at industry events. This will help bring more people directly to you. You also will be associated as someone who is knowledgeable about the topic(s) you have spoken on, with more people likely to connect with you.

### 2. CONNECT WITH ALUMNI FROM YOUR UNDERGRADUATE UNIVERSITY AND LAW SCHOOL

It can be easier to make a connection with someone who has a shared background. Reach out to alumni from your college, graduate school, or law school. Many times, there is an alumni directory you can access or your school's career services or alumni office can help put you in touch with the appropriate people. You can also visit your school's LinkedIn page to search alumni members using various search terms, including practice area, geography, or company name. Becoming more active in your relevant alumni associations is an easy way to network.

### 3. JOIN PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

There are many professional organizations you can join as an attorney, such as your local or state Bar Associations or practice specific associations. You also can become involved in committees within these associations. Through these organizations, you can keep abreast of relevant legal news, share ideas with like-minded professionals, and network with others in your field.

### 4. UTILIZE LINKEDIN

LinkedIn is a social networking tool for professionals. The power of LinkedIn comes from making trusted connections, and then, being able to see and connect with your connections' contacts. The more connections you have, the easier it is to find a contact through your personal network.

Be thoughtful before asking someone to connect.

Whenever you invite someone you don't directly know, word the invitation carefully—identify a mutual contact or shared interest or background. Also, don't ask for a favor immediately. It's important to develop a relationship first.

Your colleagues' connections are a great place to look for potential contacts. Don't be afraid to ask your colleagues for a LinkedIn "introduction."

## Step 3: Engage your network

Now that you've mapped whom you already know and learned how to add connections to that list, it's time to start engaging with your network.

### 1. CATCH UP WITH OLD COLLEAGUES OR FRIENDS

Utilize your networking map to determine which contacts you want to approach first. Grab coffee, lunch, or a drink with your connections. Discuss your professional goals—you never know who they might know or might be able to connect you with.

### 2. OFFER TO HELP OTHERS

Networking is a give and take—think about what others can do for you and what you can do for them in return. Helping others builds loyalty within your network. Giving thoughtful consideration and respect to your network can make a difference in how you and your contacts benefit one another.

People in more junior positions or with less work experience often underestimate the value they can bring to those in their network. But even things like offering your insights or knowledge, or simply expressing genuine gratitude is enough to make it a two-way street.

### 3. SET UP INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Ask for meetings with people you'd like to learn more from or who work in organizations where you would like to work. While not a job interview, an informational interview can help you gather valuable insight into a company, job, career path, or industry trends.

It's important to approach these meetings with respect and professionalism. Research the individual and organization where they work just as you would for a formal job interview. Come prepared with questions, be gracious, and keep the conversation on-topic.

### 4. FOCUS ON LEARNING

Approach networking with excitement and curiosity. Reach out to people from whom you genuinely would like to learn. When you refocus your motivation for networking, it can help the interaction feel more authentic and less like a chore.

### 5. FOLLOW UP WITH ANY NEW CONNECTIONS

After meeting someone at a conference, through LinkedIn, or after an informational interview, follow up with them. It's important to keep the conversation and momentum going—that's how you build genuine relationships. It can be as simple as sending a quick note or an article you thought they might like, or for those who are more invested in your job search, sending periodic job search updates.