

**What Is Networking?** *As a job technique:* “Connecting and interacting with others through informational interviewing for the purpose of exchanging information and acquiring advice and referrals to assist you in achieving your ultimate job search goals - getting interviews and offers.”

### **Why Bother To Network?**

#### **A.** It's a Decentralized, Chaotic Job Market

1. Networking works and is an essential job search tool because the job market (both the advertised and hidden) is decentralized.
2. The advertised job market has limitations
  - a. It probably represents no more than 10-25% of actual job openings.
  - b. It tends to represent positions at the extreme ends of the job spectrum (low paid unskilled or highly paid, highly skilled jobs), even though the majority of positions fall somewhere between these two extremes.
  - c. Many positions are filled prior to being advertised.
3. The hidden job market has the greater opportunity
  - a. 75-90% or more of the job opportunities are found here, despite the fact that this market lacks a formal structure.
  - b. Networking provides an organized system or structure to penetrate this market.

#### **B.** Networking is a Multi-Purpose Skill You Will Use Throughout Your Career

1. *Initial job search:* To get that first internship or paid position.
2. *Lateral job search:* To make a lateral move in the legal market as an experienced attorney, or to explore another field to pursue an alternative career path.
3. *Client development:* To get and retain clients.
4. *Community Service, Politics, and Other Extracurricular Activities:* To obtain the coveted Board of Directors, judicial or political appointments and community leadership positions.

### **How to Start Developing A Network**

#### **A.** Identify the Members of Your Current Network

1. Make a “contact list,” identifying as many people as possible in these categories. Include the following people on your contact list:
  - Friends
  - Neighbors (past and present)
  - Social acquaintances (including group and club members)
  - Classmates (college and graduate school)
  - Career Services Office staff
  - Law School faculty
  - Local alumni
  - Relatives
  - Clergy
  - Politicians (local, state and national)
  - Trade and bar association members

- People you have met at conferences or conventions
  - Speakers you've admired at meetings, conferences and law school programs
  - Professionals from various fields whom you have consulted in the past 12 months (e.g. doctor, dentist, optician, therapist, lawyer, real estate agent, stock broker, travel agent, hairdresser)
  - Previous employers and co-workers
2. Categorize your contact list by:
    - a. Those who are in influential positions or have hiring authority.
    - b. Those likely to have job leads.
    - c. Those most likely to refer you to others.
  3. Establish a system for keeping track of your contacts. Consider setting up a file, notebook, or note card system recording the following information for each contact:
    - a. Name, address, fax, e-mail and phone numbers.
    - b. How and when you met this contact.
    - c. Who this contact referred you to.
    - d. Correspondence you've had with this contact.
    - e. The contact's specialty, unique interests, etc.
  4. Select 25 individuals from your list to target for your first round of contacts.

## **B. Making New Networking Contacts in the Legal World**

1. Take advantage of the different forums available to you
  - a. Join the Colorado Bar Association ([www.cobar.org](http://www.cobar.org)) and the local bar association (e.g. the Denver Bar Association) as a student member. The dues for students are very low.
    1. Once you join, start going to meetings and conferences sponsored by the bar associations. The Colorado Bar Association has sections in many of the areas of practice such as business law, environmental, criminal, construction, etc. If you are interested in practicing in a specialty that has a section, there is no better way to meet and interact with prominent attorneys in that area of practice.
    2. Additionally, students interested in the specialty bars (e.g. Asian Pacific American, Hispanic, Sam Gary, Indian, Lesbian and Gay, Women's) can join and participate in the mentoring programs offered by these groups.
  - b. Join other professional or trade organizations such as the local Chamber of Commerce.
  - c. Attend networking events at the Law School:
    1. PALS (Partners at Law) - this event is held in the fall at the law school in conjunction with Alumni Weekend. Students who attend can meet and interact with alumni.
    2. Career Information Fair - held in the early spring, the Career Information Fair brings more than fifty employers from all sectors (firms, government, public interest, corporations) to the law school to meet with students on an informal basis. This is a great way for students to make initial contacts with a wide variety of people in the legal community.
    3. Judge's Day - a schedule of events at the law school brings judges from every court to the law school to educate and interact with students.
    4. Speaker Meetings - the Career Services Office invites practitioners to speak periodically on a wide variety of topics. Students can meet the

- speakers after the meeting. Several student organizations also invite speakers to the law school.
- d. Join other community organizations where you will meet professionals, even if they are not lawyers.
  - e. Volunteer! There are many opportunities to volunteer within the legal community where you can perform meaningful legal work and meet attorneys who are also volunteering their time. One example is the Colorado Lawyers Committee, which has members from all of the major law firms in Denver.
  - f. Take advantage of the Alumni Volunteer Network. Contact the Career Services Office to obtain names of alumni in the city where you plan to practice law.

## C. Build and Expand Your Network

1. How to Initiate Contact:
  - a. Write letters to the people you consider the most likely to help launch your job search in your immediate network. Let them know you are conducting a job search, but emphasize that you are doing preliminary research. *You are only seeking information and advice at this time -- not a job.* Ask them for a few minutes of their time to discuss your information needs. See the sample networking letters below.
  - b. The laws of probability apply: the more people you contact, the more useful information, advice and job leads you will receive. But don't send out more requests than you can follow-up with in a professional manner.
  - c. The process will yield a series of small networks linked to your original contacts. Write thank you notes to everyone you meet with and keep in touch if you feel a connection was made. People appreciate being told what happened as a result of their help. (See the chapter on Thank You Letters).
  - d. Once again, never ask for a job directly; always ask for *information, advice and referrals*. Be sure you are prepared with at least 10 – 15 questions before you meet with the attorney. Consider questions relevant to learning more about the individual attorney's practice area, the local legal market from their perspective, how they conducted a job search at the start of their careers, and what characteristics they look for in a new attorney. (See the sample informational interview questions listed below). It certainly is acceptable to take notes.
  - e. Telephone vs. Letter Approaches
    1. Use the telephone only to reach people in your network whom you already know.
    2. For people you do not know, write a letter and follow-up with a telephone call.
  - f. Key Elements of the Approach Letter (see following sample letter)
    1. *Use an appropriate opener*

For referrals:

Say you are considering a career in their area of expertise (be specific). His/her name was given to you by \_\_\_\_\_, who suggested he/she might be in a good position to talk to you more fully about the practice of \_\_\_\_\_.

For “cold turkey” (no referral) approaches:

Try subtle, yet honest flattery, e.g., state you are aware that he/she has been a leader or expert in the field of \_\_\_\_\_, or whatever is both truthful and appropriate for the situation.

2. *Make the request*

Demonstrate thoughtfulness and courtesy by mentioning that you understand he/she is very busy. You hope to meet with him/her for no longer than 30 minutes to discuss specific questions relating to their area of practice.

3. *Body of letter*

Provide a brief “infomercial” or summary of your professional or academic career, emphasizing key strengths/functional skills that will be relevant to reader. Describe your career objectives or areas of interest as determined thus far.

State in your letter that while the purpose of your meeting is to gather information and advice, you are enclosing your resume in advance of your anticipated meeting, not as a request for a job per se, but solely to provide him/her with knowledge of your background.

4. *Close it right*

Mention that you will call the person at a stated date/time to determine if an appointment can be arranged. You must take the initiative and follow up the letter with a telephone call; it is *your* responsibility to schedule the meeting.

## Sample Approach/Networking Letter

**Audrey Alum**

123 University Way  
Denver, CO 80209

March 25, 2004

Mr. John Smith  
Good, Better & Best, LLP  
1700 17<sup>th</sup> Street  
Suite 2400  
Denver, CO 80202

Dear Mr. Smith:

Peter Jones, a former associate with your firm, suggested I contact you because of my experience and interest in litigation. As a recent graduate of the University of Denver College of Law who is interested in a career as a prosecutor, I was hoping I could meet with you to get your advice and talk to you more fully about the practice of law and litigation.

While working at the Denver City Attorney's office in the employment law division, I gained extensive experience in litigation. Through drafting various motions and interviewing clients, my legal skills improved dramatically. Xavier Duran, my supervising attorney, was very pleased with my performance and encouraged me to pursue a litigation career. I am confident the skills I gained while working under his direction will provide a solid foundation as a new associate.

As a student attorney for the Student Law Office, I have represented 5 clients in criminal law related matters. This experience allowed me to excel in all aspects of client representation including: interviewing and counseling clients, developing and maintaining client relationships, and researching and writing both pre-trial and post-trial motions and briefs. As such, I have successfully argued 3 motions before Denver District Court Judges. Trial advocacy is my passion and I am excited to begin my career in this area.

I have enclosed my resume for your perusal. I would like the opportunity to speak with you about breaking into the Denver legal community and ways to gain experience as a litigator. I will call you next Wednesday in the afternoon to see if we can set up a time to meet. I know you are very busy, and therefore I will be able to be completely flexible with your schedule. In the meantime, please feel free to call me if you have any questions at 303-555-1234. Thank you for your time and I look forward to talking to you next week.

Sincerely,

*Audrey Alum*

Audrey Alum

Enclosure

## Sample Letter Requesting Informational Interview

**John A. Smith**

1234 Main Street  
Denver, CO 80000

April 12, 2004

Mary Jones, Esq.  
Richards, Jones & Dunn, P.C.  
4567 Broadway, Suite 1000  
Denver, CO 80010

Re: Opportunity for Informational Meeting

Dear Ms. Jones:

My interest in employment law is the reason for contacting you. I have learned from my research that your firm has a substantial employment law practice and has achieved an outstanding reputation among Colorado employers in both litigation and transactional matters.

I am a second-year student at the University of Denver College of Law. My interest in employment law began when I worked as a human resources management trainee for a major commercial bank during the two years before my admission to law school. My interest in this practice area has grown, especially after the employment law course I completed last semester.

I would like to learn more about employment law practice from an accomplished practitioner. Would you be available to meet with me for about 30 minutes to answer some questions I have and offer your advice? I would very much appreciate having the opportunity to get your views on working in this area.

I will call your office within the next week to see if we can set up a mutually convenient time for an informational meeting.

Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,

**John Smith**

John Smith

## D. Conducting Informational Interviews

1. Keep focused. What you seek is:
  - a. Advice and information about what practitioners do on a daily basis in their area of practice; what skills are required and how best to develop expertise in the area.
  - b. To expand your network by obtaining one or more names of additional contacts who may provide further information (or job leads!).
  - c. To make a favorable impression so that you will be remembered in the future should an opportunity arise.

### 2. Interview Format

- a. Plan to cover your questions in 30-45 minutes or less
- b. Do research on the firm/attorney. Sources of information include Internet, library, firm brochure, and annual reports. Show that you are taking an interest *in them* as you are asking them to take an interest *in you*.

3. Initiate the interview by emphasizing your appreciation, e.g.:

*Thank you for taking time to see me today. I appreciate your willingness to take time out of your busy schedule to speak with me about my career plans.*

4. Ask probing questions to elicit information about the nature of the area of law, e.g.

*I am in the process of exploring several areas of practice. I am talking with attorneys such as you, who have a great deal of experience in the area of \_\_\_\_\_. I am particularly interested in learning more about opportunities and the future outlook for this field and the skills and background you think are necessary to practice in this area.*

5. Be able to discuss each item on your resume – thoroughly! If you choose to put it on your resume, it is fair game for the reader to ask one or two questions about each one if desired! Anticipate questions that may be asked and have one or two examples readily available in your mind that illustrate different skills and strengths you developed.

6. Focus on “how” and “what” questions concerning specific jobs or careers:

What special skills or expertise does one need to work in this area of law?  
What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of this practice area?  
*What is the future outlook in this area of law?*

7. Solicit advice for developing a successful job search strategy. You may want to know their ideas on how to:

- Acquire the required skills for the position you seek
- Market yourself in the particular practice area
- Identify both advertised and unadvertised job vacancies
- Develop new job leads
- Identify/resolve prospective employers’ possible objections to hiring you

## E. Sample Informational Interview Questions

- What is a typical day on the job like for you?
- What percent of your time do you spend each day in various activities of your work? (this can be tailored to the individual attorney's practice)
- How free are you to do your work as you want to?
- What types of pressures or problems do you contend with?
- What do you consider to be the most satisfying and the most frustrating aspects of your work?
- What types of promotions/professional development opportunities are available to you?
- What types of things should I be doing to prepare myself for this type of work?
- If you could start all over again in launching your career, what steps would you take?
- Have you ever practiced or considered practicing in another field/area of law?
- Do you have an opinion/information about the job market for attorneys in your field?
- Do you have any suggestions as to other attorneys I could contact to talk about what it is like to practice \_\_\_\_\_ law?
- Can you tell me which firms in the Denver area have a reputation for quality legal work in \_\_\_\_\_ law?

## F. Concluding Your Meeting

Finally, end the interview with requests to be *referred* and *remembered*. For example:

*Thanks so much for all of your help. I have learned a great deal today. I would like to ask one more favor. I am trying to talk with several attorneys in this area. Do you know a few other attorneys who might be willing to meet with me, as you have today?*

Don't make your networking prospects uncomfortable by asking them directly for a job or job lead. Your approach should be subtle and professional. Remember that you were given time to discuss career information, advice and referrals.

*I would appreciate it if you could keep me in mind if you learn of any openings. Please feel free to pass my name or resume on to anyone you feel might be interested in my background.*

## G. Follow Up After the Meeting

Always follow up your informational interviews with thank you letters. Express your gratitude for the person's time and advice, referring specifically to a point of your conversation you found particularly helpful, and reiterating your wish to be remembered and referred. The letter should be typed and sent out within a few days of your meeting. (See the chapter on Thank You Letters).