

# Zen & The Art of Legal Networking

INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL LAWYERS NETWORK

PUBLISHED BY

Lindsay Griffiths



## Zen & The Art of Legal Networking

Posted at 1:37 PM on April 13, 2011 by Lindsay Griffiths

### Some Advice to New Marketers on Attending Conferences

As I attended my sixth LMA Conference last week, it occurred to me that I couldn't believe how fast my time in the legal profession has gone! But it also occurred to me that there may be many people out there attending their first conference, or just starting out in the legal or professional services fields, who never got any lessons in college about how to act in a business environment.

This week, I heard someone say during a session that if you're going to be "Debbie Gossip" as a marketing professional, it will be difficult to gain the trust of your lawyers and as such, difficult to get the respect needed to get a seat at the table. I think the younger generation in the workforce (and at 31, I include myself in that) has a lot of enthusiasm, talent and incredible ideas. But sometimes we lack the professional polish that can get those ideas implemented. So I wanted to offer up some advice on what I've learned in my six and a half years in legal marketing - some of these things might seem silly or overly conservative, but they will help you stand out for your work instead of for a less professional reason:



- *You never know who's sitting around you:* This can be a tough lesson to learn if you're sitting by the wrong person and don't know it. Whenever you're attending a professional event - and sometimes even if you're just sitting at the airport - you can never be sure of who's around you. You may be out of the office and not sitting with your boss, but what if someone who is friends with your managing partner is sitting next to you, listening to you complain about work or office politics, hearing you drop swear word after swear word, or seeing you dressed inappropriately while you're hanging around the pool? It's always a good idea to behave professionally all the

time - both offline and online - because you never know who's listening. Even if it's just another peer from the conference, you want them to take you seriously as a professional.

- *Along these lines, as I mentioned earlier, keep gossip to yourself:* If you need to tell someone, call a friend unrelated to the firm or tell your mom about it. Not everyone's office politics are always clear, so you might put yourself in an awkward position, and becoming known as the office gossip is both unflattering and gets you noticed for the wrong reason.
- *Ladies, I hate to say it, but there is a double standard for us.* And if you want to compete in what is essentially a male-dominated industry, you've got to up your game considerably. This might be unfair, but it's a fact for now, so it's better to just suck it up. So don't dress provocatively, cry privately in the ladies room if you're overcome by emotion at work, and keep up the professional side of yourself all the time. If you're professional, people will take you seriously and focus on your ideas, not your behavior.
- *Watch the drinking:* You may think you're among friends, but you can quickly become the butt of people's jokes if you overindulge at a work event and say or do something that makes you the center of attention for all the wrong reasons. You want to get a reputation for doing excellent work and adding to your firm, not because you were dancing on a table at the last Christmas party or flirting with a senior partner.
- *Dress the part:* The legal profession still values a very classical style of dress - so suits carry the day. You can always dress it up with accessories, but the standard idea of "dress for the job you want, not the job you have" definitely still applies. Of course, every firm culture is different, but it's a good idea to keep an eye out for what the senior members of the firm, and those you report to, are wearing and mimic their style while adding your own flair.
- *Network:* I'm the first to admit that I'm shy and have trouble just walking up to someone at a conference and saying hello. But when you're attending a conference and you spend the entire time with one or two people that you know from the office or local LMA chapter or hiding in your room, you're really missing out on some key opportunities. Meet some marketers who are more senior than you - they know the industry well and can give you advice, introduce you to some of the big players in the industry, and help you with your professional development. If you're using Twitter, figure out who's in the session with you and offer to meet up with them afterwards - you can use the content of the session as an icebreaker. Sit down at a random table for lunch and introduce yourself to everyone there. As we learned from the Disney speaker, you never know where your next idea is going to come from, so you've got to challenge yourself a bit and get out of your comfort zone. It does get easier over time, I promise (and [Twitter makes a huge difference!](#)).
- *Take advantage of the opportunities at the conference:* Don't skip sessions, meals, or networking opportunities - sometimes, even when you think something will be silly, it can turn into an excellent relationship-building opportunity. You might miss out on meeting some really great people, hearing some inspiring ideas, or learning something that will make you an invaluable asset to your firm. Think because you're a more junior marketing professional who doesn't meet with clients that you don't need to sit in on a client panel? Think again - when you get back to the office, you could write a short summary or blog post and share it with the attorneys at your firm. They see that your attendance at the conference was of value to you and to them, and

they get evidence that you understand better how to assist them in best serving their clients.

- *Never forget you're at a professional conference:* I had a fabulous time at LMA 2011, and I have a lot of great friends there. But I've got to remember that whether I'm at the pool, running in the gym, riding the "Magical Express" or sitting in a session, I'm "at work" because my professional colleagues can be anywhere. As long as I remember that, I never have to worry I'm making the wrong impression.

These are just a few things I've noticed at this and other conferences - are there any other more senior marketers out there who can offer some additional advice?

Lindsay Griffiths of the International Lawyers Network  
179 Kinderkamack Road  
Westwood, NJ 07675  
Phone: (201) 594-9985  
Fax: (201) 740-9765