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Chair | Young Lawyers Section

## How to be the Control Centre of Your Network

In my September 2004 article, I told you about my employment history and the methods I used to get new – and better – jobs. If you remember, I wrote that many of those tactics would also serve you well when you were ready to start networking. We will re-cover those topics later in this article, but, as always, I'd like to define a few terms so we know what we are talking about.

The Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary defines “network,” when it is used as a noun, as:

*A large system consisting of many similar parts that are connected together to allow movement or communication between or along the parts or between the parts and a control centre.*

When used as a verb, network means<sup>1</sup>:

*To meet people who might be useful to know, especially in your job.*

### What Does Network Mean to Me?

So what can we glean from these definitions and how can we use them in our practice? First we will substitute “people” for “parts” in the noun definition. Doing this, gives us the following definition of network:

*A large system consisting of many similar people that are connected together to allow movement or communication between or along the people or between the people and a control centre.<sup>2</sup>*

This modified definition dovetails nicely into the verb definition of network: “to meet

people who might be useful to know, especially in your job.”

Thus, in order “to meet people who might be useful to know, especially in your job” you need to create “a large system consisting of many similar people that are connected to together to allow movement or communication between or along the people or between the people and a control centre.”

### What Is A “Control Centre?”

I know what you are thinking: “Now that I know what a network is, how does that help me?” The first step is for you to recognize you are the “control centre” in this situation, which means you can act as a conduit of information to the other people in your network.

As the control centre you can monitor what is going on with the people in your network: What they are doing, what they need, what they would like to do; and move that information by communicating it to someone else in your network.

For example, you have a friend who really wants to sell a mint green Yugo. Frighteningly, you have another friend who really wants to buy a mint green Yugo, so you put them together, and the transaction is done. They have bought and sold a car and they now know you are the sort of person that put things to together.

Another, perhaps more relevant example: You are a member of an organization; let's say the Young Friends of the Cleveland Museum of

Fire-eaters (OK maybe not so relevant – but keep reading). They are putting together a program on “Everything a Young Fire-eater Should Know About Starting Their Business” and they need a someone who can discuss the legal issues involved with running a business in which flammable materials are not only consumed, but expelled. You know about 10 people in your law firm who can discuss insurance coverage issues and liability waivers, and one of them is looking for opportunities to speak on the topic. You put your colleague in touch with the organization and both of them now know you not only have access to information and knowledgeable people, but you know how to put them together.

That is what it means to be a “Control Centre:” You meet people, you collect information, you retain the information, and – when possible – you put people together who need and/or have that information. If you are really good, you become someone's first call when they have a problem.

### Developing Your Network/Becoming a Control Centre

Now how can you do this? Let's go back to my article from last September. If you remember, I told you that finding a legal career comes down to a few parts:

1. Excel in the job you are doing right now.
2. Put yourself in a position to meet the types of attorneys you want to work for and with.
3. Be able to explain to people what you've done and how it can benefit them.

<sup>1</sup> If you are like me and like to study words in general some interesting related definitions include: “support network”: a group of people who provide emotional and practical help to someone in serious difficulty; and “the old boys network”: the way in which men who have been to the same expensive school or university help each other to find good jobs.

<sup>2</sup> Yes, I know that I am using the European spelling of “centre.” This is to show that this column is not only informative but cosmopolitan, as well.

<sup>3</sup> The Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary defines the informal verb “schmooze” to mean “to talk informally with someone, especially in a way that is not sincere or to gain some advantage for yourself.”

<sup>4</sup> Yeah, I don't know how you rank something like that either, but for our purposes I think it is good enough to recognize that he is a really good networker.

The process for networking is the same, but as I said then, and I reiterate now, networking does not mean schmoozing<sup>3</sup> people for business.

Networking and becoming a Control Centre is harder than schmoozing. You need to:

1. Identify your goals.
2. Put yourself in a position to meet people that can help you attain your goals.
3. Determine what their needs are.
4. Figure out how you or someone in your network can help them.
5. Demonstrate how you can be valuable to them. Most importantly, you have to want to build a network and be a Control Centre, and you have to sincerely want to take on those responsibilities – this is what separates the Control Centre from the schmoozer.

Because my firm frowns on its employees being accused of plagiarism, I refer you to an article in the January 2003 edition of *Inc. Magazine* entitled, “The 10 Secrets of a Master Networker” (it can be found by doing a search on the *Inc. Magazine* website — [www.inc.com](http://www.inc.com)). This article not only provided me with a great deal of information, but has helped me refine my approach to networking – which you will learn about in a few paragraphs. In this article, the author passes along the wisdom of Keith Ferrazzi – who is referred to in the article as “the world’s best networker<sup>4</sup>” – and summarized Ferrazzi’s techniques in 10 rules (I’ve provided the gist in italics but you should read the article):

**RULE 1: Don’t network just to network.**  
*You should always have a goal and be sincere.*

**RULE 2: Take names.** *You should identify the people you want to meet to advance those goals.*

**RULE 3: Build it before you need it.** *You can’t build a network instantaneously. Ferrazzi says, “People can tell the difference between desperation and an earnest attempt to create a relationship.”*

**RULE 4: Never eat alone.** *Keep in touch with the people in your network.*

**RULE 5: Be interesting.** *Be able to talk about the things that interest you and would interest others.*

**RULE 6: Manage the gatekeeper – artfully.**  
*Learn to be nice to other people’s secretaries.*

**RULE 7: Always ask.** *It never hurts to ask people about themselves.*

**RULE 8: Don’t keep score.** *Successful networking isn’t only about getting what you want, it’s about you making sure others in your network get what they want. It’s all about “social arbitrage.”*

**RULE 9: Ping constantly.** *Stay in touch with those in your network.*

**RULE 10: Find anchor tenants. Feed them.**  
*Identify those people in your network that know the people you want to meet and have them introduce you.*

After reading this article, I updated my rules to incorporate the essence of Ferrazzi’s techniques. The result is this six-rule framework:

1. Excel in the job you are doing right now.
2. You should never network just to network.  
You need to have a sincere interest in people because everyone hates being schmoozed.
3. Put yourself in a position to meet the types of people you want to meet and learn about, and be able to explain to them what you know and how it can benefit them, or find out what they know and how it can benefit you.
4. Start working on your network early so it is ready when you are ready to use it. During this time you should set up your “knowledge network,” which I described last month. Your knowledge network is comprised of a variety of people that can inform you about the trends and issues in your area.
5. Keep in touch with the people in your network.
6. Remember the goal is not to just help yourself, you need to be interested in helping

others, and recognize that good networking is “social arbitrage.”

Before you do anything else, re-read Rule Number One. As a young attorney your primary job is to make sure that you do good work and make your client look good. (See my November 2004 article for a recap). In most cases you will not be expected to develop business until you are settled in your career. It is not by accident that it took more than 1000 words before business development was even mentioned. Networking is the work that you must do to develop business. However, Rule Number One is what makes the process go. If you don’t excel at your job and achieve demonstrated success, you will never be able to convince anyone that you can be their Control Centre. You need that credibility so people – inside and outside of your organization – will feel comfortable using you as a resource to solve their problems.

The rest of the steps aren’t simple and require imagination, ingenuity and tenacity, but if you are committed and put in the work you will see results. ☺

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