

ZEN AND THE ART OF LEGAL NETWORKING

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INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON
*Relationship Building
within the International
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Holiday Networking is Coming.

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The end of this week marks the beginning of December, and we all know what that means...

Holiday party invitations are coming.

For introverts like me, holiday parties are probably not high on your list of exciting December “to dos” – it’s not that we don’t love them; it’s just that they’re rather exhausting. Extroverts may see them as a chance to

enjoy a bit of relaxation with friends and meet new people. But no matter how you view holiday parties, they are definitely a key opportunity to network.

Whether you're a networking pro or feel like there's room for improvement, every networking experience is a chance to hone your skills. Recently, we held our Regional Conference of the Americas, and invited David Ackert, President of The Ackert Advisory, to facilitate a type of speed-dating session that we refer to as our "referral rendezvous." We matched our lawyers in groups of 3-4 people, and they had 25 minutes to talk and connect with each other – some of them have known each other for many years, while others were meeting each other for the first time.

David's networking tools offered a road map to maximize the time invested in each conversation. These tips are valuable not just for speed dating purposes, but across all networking opportunities, so I am sharing them with you today as we head into a whirlwind season of relationship-building possibilities.

Before we get started, let's address the fundamental problem of networking that David brought up during his presentation – that "networking is sloppy."

Does this sound familiar? You're at an event, and meet someone new or even run into someone you already know. You talk about the weather, how you're enjoying the event that you're at, what your plans are for the weekend, etc. David describes this as meandering from topic to topic to fill the silence. There's nothing wrong with it, but it's not structured around a business result. Over time, you *can* put these meandering conversations together to create bonds with people, but the end result is still returning to your office and pinning all of your hopes that this time you've invested will somehow translate into business.

In order for that to happen, the following would have to occur:

- A matter that is appropriate for you would have to cross their desk.
- They'd have to remember you in that moment, and in some cases, remember where you're located.
- They'd have to carve out time in between billable increments to call or email you to let you know about the matter.

That stacking up of circumstances is not always a convenient occurrence, so more often than not, it doesn't happen.

What if, instead, you were more strategic about your networking and helped to *create* those opportunities for business? David tells us how it's possible.

Tip One: Build Personal Relationships

David first invited the group to share about their enthusiasms with each other – and this is something you can easily do in any networking scenario. The key here is to focus more on being interested^{**ed**} than being interesting^{**ing**} (and I'll delve more into that in a moment), so ask the people that you're talking to what they love to do in life. Ask about their hobbies, their families, their weekend activities. Find out what it is that lights them up. When you share these things, it moves the relationship-building from a mentally-oriented process to something that is heart-driven and that's where human connections are built. It might feel a little bit strange at first, but I promise that the people that you're with will find it refreshing to talk about something that they're genuinely excited about, instead of recycling the same conversation that they've had all evening.

Then, take it further. David talked about the **GET** – the **G**esture of **E**xtraordinary **T**houghtfulness. To illustrate this, he shared the story of meeting a lawyer for lunch that he'd been introduced to by a mutual friend. About 20 minutes into lunch and a very meandering conversation, this lawyer stopped and asked if they could change topics. He asked David to share what he really loves to do, and it came out that David and his wife love going to movie premieres, with his favorite being science fiction. The deeper into the conversation they got, the more sure David was that his lunch companion was also a science fiction buff, but it turned out that he was really interested in what David had to say...and was interviewing him for the GET.

Following their lunch, David received an email from the lawyer, saying that he'd ordered a copy of his favorite science fiction book and planned to read it, after David had spoken so passionately about it. In return, he'd also attached a \$20 gift certificate for Amazon to the email, and suggested that David use it to purchase and read *his* favorite book, a biography of Winston Churchill. That gesture fast-forwarded their relationship 5-10 years in terms of closeness and loyalty, and if there was any referral that David could have given him in that moment, he would have. He observed that we all hope to accelerate our relationships to develop business, and sometimes, a thoughtful follow-up is all that's needed to penetrate the fog and static of our busy lives.

The GET is always valuable, but depending on how well you already know the person you're talking to, you can spend more or less time on this part of your conversation. Ideally, you want to include both of these tips to get the full benefit of your networking.

Tip Two: Identify Referral Opportunities & Follow Up on the Spot

The first tip identified how you build the foundation of your relationship and interview for the GET. Now, you're moving on to identifying referral opportunities. David shared four ways to accomplish this:

- **Request for Services:** This is about cutting to the chase. Often, you can end up in conversations where you start storytelling about the capabilities of the firm or your own practice (Think: "My partner does litigation work for medical device companies, and we also have an employment law practice that...blah, blah, blah."). When you do this, you're hoping that the other

person will connect the dots – and David calls that out as lazy networking. So cut to the chase instead and ask pointed questions, like “Are you doing leasing work in Ohio?”

- **“Call me when...”:** This is about identifying the condition that triggers the need for the services of either your practice or your firm. You can frame your services based on that trigger.
- **Announcement:** What is a new capability of your firm that people don’t know about (something within the last year). This may trigger an opportunity. For example, “We just launched a drone law practice.”
- **Geographical LinkedIn search:** This starts to touch on the idea of follow up, which we’ll delve into in more detail in a moment, but start with LinkedIn. Before you do anything else, ensure that you have downloaded the LinkedIn app to your mobile device. This is going to allow you to network and follow up in real time. While the following scenario I’m going to describe may work best when you’re connecting with people outside of your city, you can also use the LinkedIn app to follow up in person in other ways. In this case, let’s say you’re talking with someone from another jurisdiction – use the search function within the LinkedIn app (yes, as you’re talking with them), and look up all of your contacts in their city, for example, Cleveland. Refine your search to ensure that you’re getting only 1st tier connections who are based in that specific region, and then you’ll have a list of results of who is currently in Cleveland doing business. Scroll through that list, and you may realize that you know the GC of a local company there pretty well and you can connect the person you’re talking to with him or her. Send an email right through the app, right at that moment, saying that you’re sitting with this person right now, and suggest that they get together. David pointed out that even with the best of intentions, that’s never going to happen if you wait to do it until you get back to your office.

That point is one he made about all follow up in general. We all make notes, set reminders, give ourselves a mental nudge to follow up with people in the days or weeks following a networking conversation. But often, the rigors of the next day have already gotten started before you have a chance to even think about the things that you promised to do. So why not start the ball rolling for your next steps right away, as you’re networking with someone?

Using the LinkedIn app is one way to do that – if you’re not already connected to each other, do that right as you’re standing with the person. It’s much quicker to do that than to try to remember to go through your stack of business cards from the night before the next morning. Plus, you’ll see what connections you have in common with that person, and it may give you an opportunity for further conversation or business potential.

You can also email each other right on the spot too – perhaps you want to talk about collaborating on an article, referring a client, or getting together for lunch to talk more one-on-one. Don’t wait to set that up when you’re back in the office – send a quick email to the person either with the follow up in it, or asking him

or her to get back to you to arrange a meeting or call. He or she now has your contact details and it serves as another item on the “to do” list instead of the “remember to do” list.

The one thing you can work on *after* your networking experiences is sending the GET that you learned about during the first part of your conversation. Not every conversation will illuminate the GET for you, and not every opportunity is the right one to send one, but if something strikes you as you’re speaking with someone, use the few moments after you talk to them to send yourself an email (or put together some other reminder system) that will encourage you to commit to the GET.

Give these ideas a test run as you engage in your holiday networking this year – our lawyers had an incredible number of opportunities for follow up based on their use of David’s strategic networking tips, so it was abundantly clear that following a plan for your networking is more effective than meandering relationship-building. I also highly recommend working with David directly if you or your firm are looking for additional assistance.

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