



AND THE ART OF LEGAL NETWORKING

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INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON
*Relationship Building
within the International
Lawyers Network*

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Networking Tip: Find Your Niche

BY LINDSAY GRIFFITHS ON JUNE 29, 2016



Let's face it: networking can be hard. Unless you're someone who thrives on meeting other people (and many of us don't, including yours truly), networking is something that we consider to be a chore, albeit a necessary one.

So why not pair it with something that you already like doing?

For example, I've been a runner on and off for about the last seven years – mostly off (you may remember when I mentioned that running is like content marketing). Over the past year, I've really committed to it, and even ran my first half marathon in April. As I've posted about my runs on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, I've found a community of runners among my existing network – including of my own lawyers. It turns out that quite a few of my lawyers are runners themselves.

In the June 25, 2009 issue of the NY Times, Liz Robbins said:

“

Long distance running may be the ultimate individual pursuit, offering a time for peace, solitude and communion with one's body. But for many runners, distance running is the epitome of community, a true testament to the uplifting spirit of the sport.”

Because I want to foster this sense of community among the lawyers in our Network, we've created a running group (RunILN) for this purpose. We may be a group of runners, but groups don't have to list “business networking” as a main goal to help develop business relationships. We're bringing together a small group within the larger ILN community to talk about and engage in something that they're already passionate about.

We had our inaugural RunILN group run at our 28th Annual Conference this month in Boston, with marathoner and host firm associate, Dan Janis, leading us on a 4.7 mile run around Boston – it was both a great way to see the city, and further connect with the lawyers who ran. Our plan for the future is to combine a group run with each of our conferences, bringing in local law firm runners, competing in coordinated races when we can, and staying connected through our Facebook group in between. Runners can also meet up when traveling to each other's cities on business, and we can cheer on the teams of runners that many of our law firms have, who compete in their own races and charity events.

You don't have to start your own group to use your passion to network though – plenty of groups exist already that will match your passion with networking.

- Identify something that you love doing: reading, cooking, running, kayaking, yoga, crocheting, etc.
- Look for existing groups that combine your passion with your geography – there are two ways you can do this. Start with google, or go to Meetup.com. What I like about Meetup is that you may even find things on there that you wouldn't have thought to try before that will spark your interest – while networking is easier if you've got a shared passion to start with, I'm also all about trying new things too. I made some great friends my first year of college when I joined the fencing club on a

total whim.

- Go to your first meeting!

It seems nerve wracking, but you've already got the comfort zone of doing something that you love and enjoy, and you'll be sharing that with a group of people who, for the most part, love and enjoy it too. Not all of them will be business prospects, but some of them may be, or some of them may be able to introduce you to potential clients. And at the minimum, you're also practicing your networking skills for when you do have to go to events dedicated only to networking – by then, you'll be a pro.

And if you don't find a group that's right for you, why not start one? Send out a note on Facebook among your local (or not so local) friends and see who shares an interest in reading the same leadership book you've been meaning to get to this summer, or who might want to get together for a chili cookoff once a month. Bring those suggestions into the office, and send out an email to see who you can entice into participating, and which of your clients might even be on board. Get them to bring friends and colleagues along too.

When you combine something that you love and enjoy doing with networking, not only will you feel a part of something and find a community that offers you mutual support, but you may also develop some business at the same time.

What successes have you found when combining your passions with networking?