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Two Easy Tips to Power Network Like a Pro

BY LINDSAY GRIFFITHS ON JULY 26, 2017

How can we network better?

Many posts offer the same tips, spun in a different way – and that's important, because I can always get something out of implementing the tried and true. But when I find something unique, I'm always happy to share it.

Recently, I came across this piece from Branding Magazine, with "5 Tips to Network Like the Pros." Despite all of the change happening in the legal industry, we still know that relationships are paramount – and maybe even more so than ever.

Bearing that in mind, let's work on supercharging our networking. Branding Magazine offers 5 tips, but let's take a look at two of them, and how they relate to the legal industry.

Before we start, let's first consider a couple of important points that the article makes about why networking is so essential – beyond just for building client relationships. In case you've ever thought that networking was a waste of time…

> **consider the following true story:**
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> **If Steve Jobs had not connected with Steve Wozniak, the Apple I would not have been invented in 1976. A year later, this extraordinary machine evolved to become the Apple II – the best-selling personal computer of that time. While Jobs had an uncanny vision of what was possible in a burgeoning computer industry, Wozniak knew how to assemble the dream into a tangible asset. This chance meeting resulted in a multibillion dollar business."**
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> **This is not the exception but the norm. *In business, it is often the power of a chance meeting between two individuals that sparks a revolution." [Emphasis mine]***

This is also the difference between what they term as "ordinary networking" and "power networking." Ordinary networking is what we're most familiar with. As described by Branding Magazine:

> **Most people do basic networking, and most people achieve poor results. They attend a meeting, conference, or seminar, briefly introduce themselves with a well-rehearsed elevator speech, and hand the other person a business card. Ordinary networking focuses on brief introductions, handshaking, and collecting business cards. Unfortunately when the participants go back to the office, most of the cards end up in a drawer or in the trash."**

Does that sound familiar? We've talked about how you can make more of your networking than this before, but Branding Magazine really takes it to the next level – what they call "power networking:"

> Power networking is something entirely different. While ordinary networkers are content with getting a few leads for their business, power networkers know that meeting new people can result in one of three scenarios:
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> In the first scenario, they might meet someone who later introduces them to someone else who has a profound effect on their business.
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> In the second scenario, they might meet someone who has an extraordinary talent that adds life to a business idea (think of Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak).
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> In the third scenario, they might meet someone who can help them win a big deal, either as a direct investor, customer, or referral to financing.
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> For a power networker, a single 'chance' contact can yield a ten to hundredfold ROI."

For the lawyers I know, this is where you want to be. So how can you be a power networker?

Tip One: Do Your Research

We've talked about this before, but I cannot emphasize enough how important this is – and in today's world, it's even easier than ever before.

Social media gives you incredible research tools on your targets:

- The latest news stories about them.
- The experience and interests of their employees.
- The things the company really cares about.

And more. As Branding Magazine says:

> Power networkers do research. They know what companies and individuals will be in attendance. They have a list of who they would like to connect with. They know about who is who, what people do, and how they can add value to their business. All of this information is readily available simply by looking up corporate information posted on company websites and reviewing social media profiles."

This takes an investment of time, but it's well worth it. It's the age old idea of investing more time up front to get more out of the experience – "you get what you pay for." Let's say you need a new appliance for your kitchen. If you walk into the store on a whim, look at the first floor model you see for a moment, and tell the sales person that you want that very one, it's possible that you'll luck out with something great. It's equally possible that you'll get something that's sub-par, that stops working after six months, or has an issue that requires constant maintenance.

If you'd done some research, you might know those things before you walked into the store. In the best case scenario, you'll do some online searching, compare models and read reviews. You'll find out what has the features that are most compatible with your lifestyle, and where you want to invest your money. While it still may not work out, the chances are much better that you'll be happy with the results.

Networking is the same – if you're paying money to attend a conference, or at the very least, investing the cost of your time in attending a meeting, why walk in there cold? You may leave with some business cards or follow up opportunities, but they probably won't lead anywhere. Instead,

- Get a list of the attendees.
- Review it to see who you might like to meet and get to know.
- Check their websites and social media profiles for more information – learn where you have some connections.
- Reach out in advance to arrange to meet, so you're guaranteed to have the meeting AND have their contact information at hand.

The investment of time will be well worth it.

And in the case of meeting with a potential client, you can use the internet and social media to learn more about the company and the individuals that you're going to meet with.

- What news stories have recently been published about their organization?
- What recent legislation or decisions have come down that might impact their industry & company, and how will it affect them?
- What areas of overlap do you have with the individuals in the meeting?

It can feel a bit like stalking, all this research, but in today's business environment, it's expected, and you can be fully transparent about having looked someone up on LinkedIn before your meeting to do your due diligence.

Tip Two: Be a Go-Giver not a Go-Getter

This tip from Branding Magazine really struck me, because it's something I see ALL the time.

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> **Power networkers are go-givers, not go-getters. They aim to give so that they deserve to receive. Conversely, most people become defensive when meeting a go-getter. By offering something before expecting something in return, power networkers are able to build mutually beneficial relationships."**

It sounds totally counterintuitive – you're networking so that you can develop beneficial business relationships, but you should start by giving?

But it's absolutely true, and I see it happening all the time. When we bring a firm into the ILN, for example, we emphasize that the most important benefit for a member is the ability to service their clients by referring them *out* to other members. It's not the "getting" of referrals that spells success.

When a firm comes in with the latter expectation, no number of referrals will be sufficient for them, and they will deem the membership a failure. But when they come in with the idea of giving first, not only are they focused on the right aspects of the membership relationship, but they are also much more successful in receiving referrals as well.

This tip should especially hit home for lawyers because we all hate the word "sales." We talk a lot about business development and building relationships, but I hear time and time again that lawyers did not go to law school to become "salespeople." It feels icky.

And it should – the idea here is not to be a used car salesman, trying to get something from everyone you meet. The idea is to identify how you can help *them*. Not in the cheesy "What can I do for YOU" sort of way, but in a genuine attempt to be of service.

- You meet someone and you talk about a hobby of mutual interest, unrelated to your professional lives, maybe the local football team that you both love. You have season tickets, and after the conference, you send over an email inviting him to join you for a game, where ethically appropriate.
- You're speaking with someone who has an issue, and you're not the right person to solve it – but you know who is. You mention that you'll connect the two people via email, so that they can help, and you follow up with that.
- You're shopping for a gift, and come across something small that the person you were recently speaking with would just love. So you pick it up and send it along with a note.
- You're reading a trade magazine and see an article that deals with an issue that you know the person you just met is facing, and has some handy tips. So you tear out the article, and send it along with a note attached.

There are a myriad of ways that you can execute this tip – the key is to be thinking about how you can help people. Not only does it feel good, but it gives the other person the warm and fuzzies about you, which means YOU are the first person they think of the next time they need your expertise, or they know someone who does.

As lawyers, your primary job is to service your clients with their legal needs. To that end, they want to know that they're dealing with someone who wants to be helpful to them. Why not send that message as soon as you meet people? Tell them with your actions that you're the person who will be there when they need you, and they will remember it.

Be sure to check out Branding Magazine's other tips, and add your own in the comments below!