

Connecting for Real (relationships)!

A presentation given to Notre Dame Law Students
participating in the Galilee program

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Surviving & Thriving at a Networking Event!

- Purpose
- Strategy
- Best Places to Network
- The Art of Conversation
- Dress & Related Issues

Purpose

- What do you want to accomplish? What is your goal at a networking event?
- Your goal should be to ***make a few new friends***. Rarely will you meet the person who has the exact opportunity you want at any networking function. Yet, if you make a friend, a month or six months later when an opportunity comes across his or her desk, he or she will think of you and know how to contact you AND care enough to contact you. How many business cards do you have and you can't remember what the person even looks like – even an hour after the event?? Just try to make a few new friends. If the event is a series of meetings, come month after month. Networking is building relationships – and better yet - friendships. You don't build relationships when you just spend 10 minutes with someone. That happens best when you see each other repeatedly over time.
- In 1992 I moved to a bigger firm in Chicago. When I got there, it seemed to me that all the women attorneys hated each other and all the women secretaries hated the women attorneys. I thought, "It shouldn't be that way. It doesn't have to be that way..." (My perception may have been wrong, but it prompted me to act!) I started inviting other women attorneys involved in my cases to have lunch with me. Then they invited others. We decided to call ourselves "The Armadillo Club." Then in May 1996 the Chicago Lawyer did a half page article on us. THEN more attorneys wanted to join, including men... Now we have about 1000 top insurance coverage attorneys nationwide in the Club and our members are on both sides of the cases – both plaintiff and defense counsel. We are friends and sometimes that respect and friendship can even help resolve the cases we are handling! Our goals are still the same: to be friends, to help each other be all we were meant to be and to have fun. www.armadilloclub.com Every week I have people across the
- In 2003 I was a lector at St. Peter's Church in the heart of the Chicago Loop. As I stood on the altar looking out over the people in the pews, I thought, "This is a great place and they have a lot of programs that would help people. But if people don't know about the programs, how will they be helped? How can I let people know about St. Peter's???" As I stood there, my blonde logic kicked in. I thought, "I could hand out fliers at businesses and other places... no... I need a pool of Catholics. Wait! I went to Notre Dame!" I went home and looked up the Notre Dame Club of Chicago on the Internet. I joined. The next week I volunteered for the Networking Committee. The next month, we started Networking Breakfasts in the basement of St. Peter's and the breakfasts have been bringing alumni and friends together for 14 years now. Then, from 2003 – 2011, I was Chair of Networking for the Club and developed several smaller subgroups, including the Irish Entrepreneurs, the Attorney Network, a Construction & Real Estate Network and a Non-Profit Network. The only reason any of this happened was because the motive was to help people – not to build an empire for personal gain – AND other great Notre Dame alumni responded to the call and came together to make it happen!
www.ndlawnetwork.com

- In 2007, with a handful of friends, a new network was born: The Non-Crabby Women of Faith! Members include some of the most active Catholic women in the Archdiocese of Chicago. Of course, when you have cheerful, fun women, men eventually want to join. We support each other's catholic and charitable projects, pray for each other and have really fun parties... If I have a low moment, they cheer me up and vice versa. www.spiritnetworking.com Members are incredible people who really care about others. That has morphed into a broader network of about 250 of the most active Catholics in the Chicago area. www.1ultimatenetwork.com (on hiatus right now while I'm consumed with taking care of aging parents... There is a time for everything under heaven!)
- **Take aways:** When I started gathering my peers for lunch in 1992, I had no idea such a network would develop. I had no idea how many friends I would have over the years. We have helped each other in many ways, and many of the young attorneys who started this journey with me 25 years ago are now the heads of their firms or executives at insurance companies or other corporations. We grew up together and we helped each other climb the ladders. We help each other find jobs during career transitions or corporate/firm restructurings. The same applies to our Notre Dame networks. We build friendships – not just relationships or connections...
- Reach out to your peers now and start to build your network, your friends, and your future – and do it for the right reason – to make a few new friends and improve your corner of the world! Surround yourself with friends who help you be a better human being! Help each other climb those ladders!!!

Strategy – Don't just survive. Thrive!!!

- **If you are shy, make it a game.** No one has to know you are the only one playing. Some books say that over 90% of us are shy and uncomfortable networking. When I was a first year lawyer, my firm had its big annual dinner with 400+ clients at the Chicago Athletic Association. There were about 15 brand new associates. At the event, I noticed how my peers all congregated together and headed for the safety of the same dinner tables. I thought, "I've heard that it's the rainmakers who make partner. How can I (a little 1st year associate) get to meet clients?" I made up a game. I went around to the clients telling them that there was a competition between the 1st years to see who could collect the most business cards. (In reality, there actually was, but I was the only one of the new associates who realized it that night..) The clients were happy to help, and when I left that firm five years later, I took one of the clients I met that night with me. I was the only one of the new associates who realized at that early age that "the game" was all about making the right connections... At a networking event, everyone is there to meet people. Go for it!
- **Volunteer to help.** Volunteer to be a greeter! (It is the best way to have an excuse to talk to them...)
- **Do your homework before the event.** If there is a speaker you want to talk to, do some research. LinkedIn is a great way to get some good information on people you know will be at an event – including the organizers. Then you don't have to start with "Hi, how are you?" You can start with, "Hi, I read about that interesting project you are working on...." Don't rush in at the last minute to a function (unless you have no choice...) Come early and get the lay of the land. It will give you a chance to get collected and prepared.
- **Network with a partner.** Divide and conquer. DO NOT sit at the same table if you go with a friend or colleague. You already know your friend... For the first half of the networking event, split up and meet different people. Now you have twice as many contacts between the two of you. Make sure you understand each other's objectives so you can help promote each other. In the second half, you can now introduce each other to people who might be particularly interesting or helpful. How much nicer would it be for your networking partner to then introduce you to someone she met and say, "Let me introduce you to my good friend, John, who is absolutely THE best accountant in the Northwest suburbs!" It will sound better coming from your friend.
- **Scan the room for good opportunities to introduce yourself to people:** Look for people standing by themselves – they might really appreciate your saving them! Remember the Mayor's Aunt: Last fall I went to a "meet and greet" for the Mayor of a town in Indiana. I had never been to a "meet and greet." I entered the room and saw a woman sitting by herself at a table not talking to anyone. I went over to her and said, "Hi, my name is Linda. I've never been to a "meet and greet" before. Care if I practice with you?" She was so relieved. She said she had never been to one either and had no idea what to do. She was the newly-elected mayor's Aunt, and she was delightful! Well.... You know what I did the rest of the night. I grabbed her by the arm and took her to every group of people at that event and said, "Hi, this is the mayor's Aunt _____. We're practicing meeting and greeting, and we want to practice with you!" Then she would laugh and so would everyone else. We had a great time all night. Be creative. Be fun!

Strategy Cont...

- **More opportunities to introduce yourself....**
 - Two people standing together face to face vs. two people in an open stance. One posture invites others to join the group. The other says, “we are in a private conversation.”
 - When you are talking to others, unless you really want to have a private conversation, stand slightly perpendicular to each other in an open position and invite others walking by into the conversation. They will appreciate being welcomed and you won’t get “cornered” as easily.
 - Watch for people in a group who are looking around trying to figure out how to get out of a conversation. Save them.
 - When talking to someone, don’t be the one scanning around for a “better opportunity.” Give your full attention to that person while you are there, and then move on.
 - And of course.... The food table... It’s easy to meet people over a cocktail meatball! Yum. Isn’t this food good! (If it’s horrible, don’t complain.)
- **Don’t monopolize people.** You don’t do them or yourself any favors. I know it is safe once you have found someone nice to talk to, but you need to keep moving and meeting people.
- **Watch and learn.** Observe the people at networking events you consider to be good networkers. What are they doing? What can you learn from them? Is someone particularly charming or welcoming? What are they doing that you might do with others?
- **Give and ye shall receive, but don’t give expecting to receive.** Some networking resources seem to encourage some kind of false friendship where you ask others what you can do for them as an insincere pretext or excuse to turn the conversation to your needs. People will see through that pretty quickly. Just make a few friends – real friends.
- **Be friendly & be a friend.** Make time to help others, as you hope they make time to help you.

Best Places to Network

- **Start networking at functions where you already have a bond with the other people attending.**
 - Alumni Clubs
 - Professional and trade associations . Some of the legal organizations have student memberships for a minimal amount – or free. There can be huge benefits to joining when you are in law school. For example, if you join the Defense Research Institute (for about \$20) you can attend almost all of its conferences and seminars free. The moment you graduate, you will pay about \$800 per conference to attend. They have several conferences in Chicago each year. Even if you can't attend the whole thing, you can attend as your schedule allows and meet people who might hire you at the networking functions. Check out www.dri.org. You'll also have something else to put on your resume and learn a bit about insurance.
 - Groups formed around hobbies. A lot of business is conducted on a golf course.
 - Church: if your church does not have a networking program, start one.
 - Volunteer – This is a particularly great place to meet upper level execs who may have a passion for a certain cause, but really have no need to attend a networking function.
- **Network EVERYWHERE and with EVERYONE!**
 - Start practicing some of the skills we will talk about with your neighbors, the other soccer parents, the bank teller, the grocery clerk, etc. You don't know what tomorrow might bring.
 - After graduating from ND Law School in 1987, we moved to Munster, so I could work in downtown Chicago. I would regularly go into our local bank rather than through the drive-through window. I got to know the women tellers well, and then the bank Manager, Agnes. Agnes also went to my church. In the first week of January 1991, my husband quit his job to start his own company. He had a partner and a financial backer. The day after my husband quit his job, the financial backer, backed out. My husband took his business plan from big bank to big bank in Chicago for two weeks, but the big banks did not want to speak to a start up. He called me on a Thursday afternoon about 2:00, rather dejected. I said, "Honey, why don't I call Agnes, and see what our bank can do?" I called Agnes who said, "Come in at 4:00 to talk." With his spectacular little business plan in hand, we went in at 4:00 and came out with a \$50,000 line of credit at 4:30. That was all we needed to start. 25 years later, we have over 370 employees and about 14 offices in 10 states. You don't know what you might need 5 years from now... or even next week. Build your net(work), before you need it. It will surely help soften any fall. That is why it is important to build friendships – not just relationships or "connections."

The Art of Communication

- No opening lines less than 5 words. It is so frustrating to ask someone, “What do you do?” and have them respond. “I’m an attorney,” followed by silence and often accompanied by a blank look..... Not even a “What do you do” in return. Puh-lease! Give me something to work with!
- Please do not tell me you are a “consultant” and end there. I have no idea what that means or what you do. I can’t help you. This is especially true for young people.
- Try a three point response. Example:
 - (1) I’m an insurance coverage attorney at a large insurance company,
 - (2) If your business has a catastrophic loss or gets sued for something unusual, I can tell you if the loss is covered by your policy and whether your insurance company will or should hire attorneys to defend you and pay for the loss, and
 - (3) in my spare time I love to ballroom dance.
- Now, in a short amount of time and succinctly, you have told them
 - (1) generally what you do,
 - (2) why they might want to know you better – how you might help them, and
 - (3) something fun and interesting about yourself.

Don’t rush through it, though. Give them time to digest each segment.
Now pause and give them a few seconds to ask a question if they want.
If they do not, now ask them what they do.

Spellcheck AND proofread your e-mails before you hit send!

You had a very successful night of networking. The next morning you get out the business cards and start sending e-mails to follow up with senior alumni. Don’t just dash something off. This is where you will make your first real impression as to whether you might be a good attorney who pays attention to detail. Spellcheck doesn’t catch everything. Read.

The Art of Communication Cont...

- **It's not all about you.** Find out why the person you are talking to is there. I know a nice little lady that I would love to invite to my parties, but every conversation is all about her. Every dialogue becomes a monologue. I just can't do that to the rest of my guests... Give others a chance to talk. How are you going to find out if they know other interesting people that might be able to help you if you don't let them talk??? That is also how you will find out if there a way you might be able to help him or her?
- **Listen.** Wait. Did you hear what I said??? Listen.... Don't be thinking ahead to what you will say next. Be truly interested in the person with whom you are talking. (The advice in this section is also helpful for dates....)
- **Remember: The Art of the "rejoinder."** Who, What, When, Where, Why & How
What if someone blurts out, "I love green socks" at the event. You might give them a quizzical look and say, "Why do love green socks? How did you develop a passion for green socks? Where do you find the best green socks? How many pairs do you have? How long have you felt this way about green socks? You get the picture. In a prior life I taught Spanish 101 and 102 at Purdue University and this was a technique I used to practice Spanish with the students.
- **Be mindful of your audience.** If you are at an industry or trade association event, use your industry jargon. If you are at a general event, speak in a manner that an every day ordinary person understands. How can I recommend you to someone if I can't articulate what you do?
- **Look for commonalities to talk about.** How long have you belonged to this group? What other types of events do they have? What do you like best about being a member of X? The weather, the traffic, what you liked about the speaker you both just heard. Just start the conversation. It's not rocket science!
- **Don't complain or be negative.** Who's interested in that??? As you are complaining about and critiquing the food, the speaker or venue, I'm thinking I won't be inviting you to my next party...

Dress & Related Issues

- **Dress Appropriately:** Over the years, many young alums have asked me what to wear to a networking functions. I advise that if you are at a business networking function, and you are looking for a job, dress in a manner that makes it easy for someone to envision you as an employee in his or her organization. Obviously, if you are at a tail-gater and have the potential to meet such folks, you would not dress the same way, but you would dress “smartly.” You would want them to be able to envision you marketing with the firm’s clients in a casual atmosphere.
- **At your own risk:** Ladies, low cut blouse or postage stamp size skirt? Remember, you may meet the wife of the President of the company for which you want to work. Your card may never make it to him...
- **Practice your handshake.** Simple, but essential. Firm but not agonizing... A little old lady in church just about killed me last week during the sign of peace. She sincerely meant well, but she crushed my hand and grabbed it right where I had a cut. OUCH!
- **Wear your name tag high on your right shoulder.** When you extend your hand to shake, your right shoulder will come forward, and the person will more easily see your name. When you greet someone you have met before, make it easy on that person even if you think they remember who you are. Say, “Hi, we met last year at the Bar Association seminar. I practice labor law at XYZ firm.” Now the other person (relieved) can say, “Oh yes, of course I remember you!” You won’t have to talk with someone who has a strange look on her face as she tries to figure out how in the world she knows you... She can now focus on what you are really saying is new in your life, rather than who you are. You have now made him or her feel good about the introduction, rather than bad for not remembering your name or who you are.
- If you are writing your own name tag, write in **BIG BLOCK LETTERS.** CEO level execs who can hire you may not be able to read small print... I like the first name larger on the top line with the last name smaller below. NO SCRIPT!!!
- **Business Card Trick** – If you are in a particularly jovial networking event where it would not be rude to take photos, I ask people to hold up their business card and I take a photo of them holding the card. Then I put the photos in an album on my iPhone. Now I know the date, event and face associated with the card.
- **Smile.** You’re not at a funeral! GOOD LUCK AND GOD BLESS!!!