

## **INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING & NETWORKING**

An estimated 70-80% of all job openings are *never* advertised. Many job openings, especially those for new attorneys, are filled through personal and professional contacts.

Although you do not need lifelong or family relationships in the legal community in order to find a job, you do need to devote time during law school to meeting people in the legal community. The best way to do that is to network, and one of the easiest ways to network is to conduct informational interviews.

Networking and informational interviewing can and should be used to explore practice areas and settings, develop relationships, and as a means of eventually obtaining job interviews and professional references.

### **Identifying Your Network**

The first step in networking is to identify your contacts. The best people to contact are the people who you already know such as family friends and acquaintances, professors, former supervisors and coworkers, members of your faith community, and people you know from your hobbies or volunteer work. Before you rule out a contact, remember that all of the people in your immediate, personal network know other people - anyone of whom could be a lawyer.

### **Asking for Informational Interviews**

Once you have identified people who could be helpful, you must contact them and formally ask for their help, preferably in a face-to-face meeting. Even if a contact is someone you know fairly well, you should send them a professional introductory email.

*Courage, persistence and patience are crucial to this process!* You may have to follow up on your email more than once. And once the meeting is set, be prepared for it to get rescheduled, maybe even more than once. Attorneys are busy and often have unexpected emergencies – be patient.

If you do not know the contact, then your email should identify how you obtained their name (e.g., “Professor Warnken suggested that I should contact you.”). Just like a business letter, your introductory email should start with a formal salutation, e.g., Dear Mr. Wallace:, and closing, e.g., Best, followed by your full name.)

Examples of initial emails:

#### *Requesting a meeting from a mutual contact:*

I worked with Sam Healy at Legal Aid last summer. He suggested that I contact you. I am interested in learning more about the CINA Division at the Office of the Public Defender, and was hoping you might have time to meet with me briefly to discuss your work. I am happy to come to your office at your convenience. Please let me know some dates and times that may work well with your schedule. I know that you are very busy, and I thank you in advance for your time.

*Requesting a meeting from someone you met at an event:*

I don't know if you remember but we met at the Young Lawyers Happy Hour last week and chatted about Keith Richard's new autobiography. You kindly invited me to get in touch with you to talk further. I'm the 2L at UB who is interested in gaining advice and information about environmental practice. I interned with the Environmental Protection Agency last summer, and am interested in learning more about environmental practice in a law firm setting. I know that you are very busy, but I was hoping that you might have time to meet with me briefly to discuss your work. I would love the opportunity to hear more about your practice and career path.

Please let me know if there are some dates and times that may work well with your schedule. I am happy to come to your office at your convenience. Thank you in advance for your time.

When you are reaching out to someone you don't have a connection with, explain why you want an informational interview in a detailed way, and also take a few lines to convey that you are *very dedicated* to his or her type of practice.

*Requesting a meeting from someone you do not know, and without a mutual contact:*

I am a 3L at UB who is interested in gaining advice and information about international adoption practice. I was told by an acquaintance that you are one of the leading experts in this area, and I would be very grateful to have the opportunity to meet with you briefly to learn more about your practice and career path.

I have a background in social work, and experience in family law, especially with divorce and custody matters. However, adoption law, especially international adoption, is a strong interest of mine. I have volunteered for several years at the international adoption agency Children of All Nations, but unfortunately I have not yet had the chance to meet any lawyers that specialize in this type of work.

Please let me know if there are some dates and times that may work well with your schedule. I am happy to come to your office at your convenience. Thank you in advance for your time.

## **The Informational Interview**

An informational interview is NOT a job interview. *Do not ask for a job, or for information about particular jobs.* But treat it like an interview anyway. Be positive and enthusiastic. Say only nice things about yourself. Wear a suit or business casual attire that is on the formal side. (Review the section of the Handbook on Interviewing for more tips).

Do your research about the attorney, the field, as well as his or her organization before your interview. Come prepared with a list of topics you would like to cover. This will help you make the most of the opportunity.

## **During the Informational Interview**

Always start with small talk to create a "comfort zone" – observations about the weather, the restaurant or office, and lightly personal things such as complimenting something the contact is wearing, or discussing the people you know in common, or a connection like being from the same town.

Next, ask the person some open-ended questions about their biography. See the suggested questions below.

Then, give a brief summary of your personal background, but remember this is akin to an interview, so don't engage in "TMI" or say anything negative about yourself, e.g., "I failed Organic Chemistry so I decided to go to law school instead of getting a Ph.D. in Ecology."

Example:

I am very interested in environmental and conservation issues, and since high school, I have volunteered as a naturalist educator at some of Baltimore's area parks. I thought originally of being an ecologist, but in college, found myself gravitating towards policy and legislation and away from science, and ended up majoring in Government & Politics. I came to law school hoping to explore a possible career in environmental law.

After that, tell them how they can help you:

Example:

After working at the EPA last summer, I remain very interested in environmental practice, but I am not sure enforcement is the right fit for me. I would like to explore the regulatory side of practice, as it involves a lot of the things I do love to do and think I am good at - legal research, analysis, writing, and problem solving - but without the adversarial process. But I don't know many people who do that kind of work, so I was hoping that you might tell me about your regulatory environmental practice, and help me identify some career options in that field.

Then ask some broader questions that will give you helpful information and the additional contacts to expand your network.

Here are examples of some questions to ask during an informational interview:

- How did you get into this practice area?
- Did you know in law school what you wanted to do? How did you figure it out?
- What do you like most about your job? What are the greatest rewards? The greatest challenges?
- What are your chief day-to-day activities?
- In the field right now, where do you see the greatest activity?
- Are there opportunities for new attorneys in your field? Is your area of practice growing?
- Do you know of any groups I should join, or publications I should read regularly?
- What experiences did you have in law school that you believe best prepared you for your current position? Which courses do you feel best prepared you for your current position? Which courses do you wish that you had taken?
- I put together a preliminary list of organizations that I would really like to learn more about. Here is the list. Do you know people who work there or used to work there?
- Do you think it would be a good idea to contact those people? Would you be willing to send them an email letting them know I will be contacting them?
- Given my goals and background, can you think of any ideas of other types of organizations that I should learn more about?
- What aspects of my background do you think might appeal to employers in your area? What could be an obstacle to employment in your area?
- Can you suggest anyone else that I might contact to learn more? May I tell them that you referred me?

## **After the Informational Interview**

Follow-up, follow-up, follow-up. Send a thank you letter to your contact, thanking him or her for any specific information that they provided. And be sure to let them know when you get a job. If they were instrumental to your getting hired, you should send flowers, a bottle of wine, or a gift basket of some type to show your appreciation.

## **Maintain Your Network**

Stay in touch with your contacts on a regular basis. Your professional contacts can be a continuing source of advice, support, contact referrals, references, and information about opportunities. One day, they might even be a source for client referrals.

Keep in mind that your network is your group of professional friends. They may not be intimate relationships, but they are nevertheless friendships and should be regarded as such. Check in during the holidays to wish them and their families well. Keep them posted when you get new positions and when something good happens in your life, like your comment gets published or you get engaged. If you see an article that you think they would appreciate, then forward it to them with a brief note. You should check in with your contacts by email four to six times a year, and try to meet at least once or twice a year in person – it doesn't have to be lunch or coffee, catch up with them at a networking event or meeting that you know they will be attending, or if you both play a sport like tennis, meet up for a game. Just keep the relationships you worked so hard to establish alive and growing.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA**

### **Join LinkedIn.**

All law students need to create a LinkedIn profile. It is the first thing that will come up when employers and professional contacts google you, and they *will* google you. Create a LinkedIn profile that mirrors your resume. Take advantage of this opportunity to shine: highlight your skills and ask for recommendations from former supervisors and colleagues.

Look professional in your photograph. You should be wearing a suit, and looking into the camera directly with a friendly expression. The photograph should not look like a selfie or a snapshot. It is the first impression an employer will have of you; make the effort to get an appropriate photograph.

You can use LinkedIn as your online rolodex, which helps you keep track of your network. Also, if you know you want to have an informational interview with someone, you can quickly find out who you know who knows him or her, and might be willing to make an introduction.

### **Other Social Media – Set Privacy Settings!**

Legal employers use internet searches to aid them in their hiring decisions. Set your privacy settings as strict as possible, and don't post anything that you would not feel comfortable being seen by a potential employer.

Over the years, we have seen a number of law students lose out on opportunities after a successful interview because their prospective employers saw something on social media that they didn't like. Many other students never received interviews, solely because of their social media content.

Review all your accounts and delete immediately:

- Images of you drunk or posts that suggest you drink a lot;
- Any content that even remotely suggests an interest in illicit drugs, gambling or guns;
- Sexualized images of you or others, including photos of you in a swimsuit, and posts with sexual content;
- Mean-spirited gossip or complaints about people, especially former employers and coworkers;
- Vulgar or profane language; and
- Insensitive or potentially offensive jokes or comments.