



The nervous networker

Why do so many lawyers and barristers think networking is for nerds? It's such a contrast to the attitude of other sole traders or small business people who embrace networking as a natural and important part of life: business, professional and personal.

When I speak about networking with lawyers and barristers, they invariably look uncomfortable and ultimately admit to thinking that there's just something a bit 'icky' about it. The table below shows some of the reasons I've heard for not networking.

WHY NOT NETWORK	MY VIEW
■ I'm shy.	■ How do you go with new clients then?
■ I hate schmoozing.	■ You seem pretty good at office parties.
■ I'm too busy.	■ Is this really true?
■ I refuse to use people.	■ It's not about using people.
■ I've tried it and it doesn't work.	■ Most things take perseverance.

Okay, disbelievers, get ready to believe. Research into the usefulness of networking conducted by Herminia Ibarra, professor of leadership and learning, faculty director of the INSEAD Board and National Science Fellow at Yale University, reveals that, other things being equal, what you know is who you know.

As lawyers, you love facts and evidence, so believes Professor Ibarra. She and her team followed 30 managers making their way through what she calls a "leadership transition", an inflection point that challenged them to rethink their role. She found that the leaders found creating a professional fabric of personal contacts for support, feedback and information one of their most necessary – and most dreaded – developmental challenges. This is just as true for the senior associate transiting to partner and for the lawyer going to the Bar. They got to their positions largely on their technical ability. Now, they need stronger relational skills. Networking is a crucial part of any job. Without connections, it's nearly impossible to get anywhere.

Your network is your career life force; it gives you ideas, motivation and work. Networks are all about finding people who become meaningful in your life – people who uplift you, who get you reading and thinking in new ways, who challenge you, who care about you, who share and help. At the core, networking is a sincere and consistent effort to help others.

And, yes, you hope they will help you, too. There's nothing wrong with that. I was recently in a taxi, talking with the driver, a qualified accountant with a Masters in Finance. He was of Muslim background and unable to get a job in his field, not even an interview. He seemed a nice bloke, spoke good English and looked presentable. Now, I have a tax and business advisory firm client in regional New South Wales who can't find young, qualified accountants.

I tell my taxi driver about my client and their need. I ask for his email address and subsequently email him and obtain his CV, which I send to my client with the recommendation that they meet him. They do. Now, my

client has an eager new employee and the taxi driver is on his way to a new career in accounting.

What motivated me? A desire to help people. What does my client think about me? That I care. This is what networking is all about. To be a great networker, you have to enjoy helping people, maintaining contact and being useful to them. Networking is all about thinking, "How can I help that person?", "Who do I know that they would benefit from meeting? It's estimated that the average person knows about 250 people. Each, in turn, knows another 250 or so. This means that for each new person you meet, you gain access to a potential pool of 62,500 people separated from you by just two degrees (not six!).

By now, I can tell that you're ready to get started, so see the tips below. ●

Trish Carroll is a principal of Galt Advisory, an advisory firm focused on helping firms and individuals devise and implement practical and successful marketing and business development strategies. Visit www.galtadvisory.com.au for more information

TIPS FOR THE NON-BELIEVERS

1	Remember me?	Reconnect with people you have lost touch with – you'll be surprised how pleased they are to hear from you.
2	Ask for help	Work out what your networking goals are and get help from people you know who can help you.
3	Be strategic	Set some networking goals – knowledge, business leads and social – and network with a purpose.
4	Try before you buy	Attend functions/meetings of associations (professional, business, trade, recreational etc) to work out whether being a member is something you will enjoy and derive benefit from – then go for it (or not).
5	Be yourself	It's not about being an extrovert, it's about being genuinely interested in people, being a good listener. So develop these skills. You don't have to be larger than life, let the authentic you shine through.
6	Be prepared	If you get tongue-tied meeting new people, have some easy ice-breaker questions ready – you don't need to do all the talking, just open the way for conversation to flow. You want to listen so that you can assess whether this is a person you should know better.
7	Give to get	Always be prepared to give – it might just be an idea, a website address, a person who may be useful. Show you are willing and able to help and they will be likely to return the favour.
8	Follow up	When you've met someone you think you want to meet again, be sure to follow up and do so quickly – within a few days, not weeks.
9	Get organised	Develop a system for managing your network – no matter how crude, any system is better than none.
10	Have fun	Network with joy: it's about having fun, meeting people, learning new things and connecting people.