

Utilizing Your Alumni Network for Personal Development

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The Legal Intelligencer

May 14, 2015

Networking. It's the first thing we learn in law school. At every opportunity, we shake the hands of managing partners, storied litigators, judges and esteemed general counsel. There is so much to learn from their war stories and commitments to their practices, bar associations and alma maters. As young lawyers, and as law students, we aspire to learn from them, emulate their habits, and hope to achieve similar success one day.

What we may forget, though, is that we can also learn from each other and assist ourselves in our career goals. As young attorneys, we do not make hiring decisions, but we know who does. We know how our firms function and what our colleagues expect from us. All the while, those days of churning out countless employment cover letters to firms, judges and companies (while trying to balance studying for our last exam) are not so far behind us. And if you ask any one of us, there is something we wish we would have done differently, and we may have a tip or two we wish someone would have given us. 2Ls can learn from 3Ls; students and law clerks can learn from first-year associates; and associates can learn from each other. Together, there is a lot of knowledge to be passed on and, given the closeness in age and experience, we can be candid and comfortable knowing that we share similar interests and ambitions. Further, the commonality of our law school community immediately binds us with the goal of seeing our peers succeed. For these reasons, establishing relationships with recent alumni cannot be undervalued; these alliances will help you both professionally and socially.

As active members of our law school young alumni and student organization, we have strived to foster symbiotic relationships that help students as they contemplate their place in the profession and maintain the bonds that alumni cultivated as classmates through social and philanthropic events. Based on these experiences, we wish to impart what we have learned upon other young attorneys, to encourage relationships with peers and colleagues. Our profession is an ever-evolving practice that requires constant learning and improvement, which presents an opportunity to learn from each other.

The Job Search

Whether you are looking for your first job or considering making your first lateral move, young alumni may have deeper insights about a target firm or organization that can provide benefits. Websites can only tell you so much. Young alumni can often offer frank insight and a unique perspective on a firm's culture, leadership, opportunities for advancement and mentorship, and ways to maximize the potential benefits of a firm or organization's resources. Young alumni may also know who may be hiring and where new vacancies lie well before job postings appear.

Simply connecting with recent graduates and mentioning your job search may also cast a wider net. If others know that you are looking for a position, and they have had the chance to get to know you, the people you meet may think of you when they learn their firm is looking to add a new associate.

The Interview

Wearing a suit, bringing extra copies of your resume and writing sample, and following up with a thoughtful thank you letter are intuitive. Researching the individuals conducting the interview helps candidates appear prepared; however, the personal information about an interviewer that can be gleaned from an associate at the firm is far more valuable. Young alumni may be aware of a hiring attorney's pet peeves, idiosyncrasies, favorite teams and personal activities. They also may be able to shed light on the firm's latest victories to help you perfectly tailor responses before even stepping foot into the office. Your suit may be dry-cleaned and your shoes may be polished, but knowing your individual audience is key.

For students especially, you don't know what you don't know. What may seem standard for someone who has interviewed several times may be novel to someone with little interview experience. A student may not know to bring a portfolio and pen or what questions to be expected, whether practice-specific or the nebulous, "Why did you go to law school?"

The Job

At some point, you will be faced with presenting first arguments or taking your first deposition. While senior attorneys at the firm may provide some guidance, there may be questions you are hesitant to ask out of fear of embarrassment or looking less than prepared. This is an opportune time to rely on your peers to provide insights as to questions that may be asked or objections that may be expected. What side of the court do you stand on if you are the defendant but the moving party? What quirks does a particular judge have? What are the courtroom policies and procedures? Young alumni will have the answers.

Young alumni can also share their experiences of juggling tasks and learning to prioritize and manage

workloads that are either too light or too heavy. They can also provide insights as to mastering the art of billing, preparing for performance reviews, and even working with your first legal secretary or administrative assistant.

The Soft Skills

New attorneys work endless hours, and it's not always easy to maintain social relationships. Participating in alumni events provides the perfect excuse to socialize while still mingling with other attorneys. You will have the opportunity to catch up with former classmates while extending your professional network. Many alumni events also offer the opportunity to participate in philanthropic programs and earn CLE credits. All of these opportunities serve to bring us together as a community of young, engaged attorneys and attorneys-to-be.

Graduating from law school is a significant achievement, and the pride we take in our alma mater cannot be overlooked. Developing a young alumni network offers the opportunity to give back to your school by helping students and recent graduates succeed. Employment outcomes and professional successes reflect on the strength of the school, which in turn reflects on the strength of its alumni. The more we interact and rely on each other, the stronger we will be when we become the managing partners, the storied litigators, the judges and general counsel we all look up to now.



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