

Section V: Networking and Social Media

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The Importance of Connecting

Relationship building is a crucial part of any job search. While “networking” is the standard term of art, many students prefer to think of it as “connecting.” Connecting is simply meeting people and getting to know them for the purpose of building a relationship. It includes meeting new people, as well as keeping in touch with existing contacts.

The CSO encourages every student to build his or her network because it is the most effective way to identify job opportunities. The “hidden job market” refers to open positions that are not officially advertised. Through networking, many students identify opportunities that would otherwise never be posted. This makes sense from the point of view of employers; they would rather trust someone who comes with a personal recommendation than someone from a stack of résumés and cover letters. By connecting, you are letting people know your interests and putting yourself in a position to hear about unadvertised jobs.

Students have many options to build a network. Below are some suggestions on how to identify potential contacts and develop relationships with them.

- Family members
- Friends
- Neighbors
- People from religious activities
- People from volunteer activities
- Professionals you may know (lawyers, doctors, bankers, stock brokers, accountants, insurance agents, etc.)
- Law professors
- College professors
- College friends
- Sorority, fraternity, or social club members
- Members of professional associations
- Customers or clients
- People with similar hobbies
- Former legal employers
- Former non-legal employers
- Co-workers
- People who helped you get into law school

You can do the following to make new connections:

- Let the CSO know you are interested in helping at programs.
- Attend CSO programs. The CSO brings alumni speakers to the school throughout the year. Make sure to introduce yourself to these speakers, ask for their business cards and follow up immediately.
- Sign up for the CSO Alumni Mentor Program in January (if you have completed at least one semester).
- Get to know your professors.
- Help a professor who is organizing a conference.
- Join a student group and organize a speaker panel.
- Write an article for a legal publication.
- Join the Chicago Bar Association or other bar associations and attend committee meetings.
- Volunteer with a legal organization.
- Meet attorneys through internships, externships, and law clerk positions.
- Get to know your classmates. They are the future of the legal profession.

Many of these people are not lawyers but, guess what? Non-lawyers often know lawyers! Make sure to let these people know you are in law school and that you are looking to meet people in the field who can answer questions, provide advice, and put you in touch with additional contacts. To make it easy, focus first on those people who helped you get into law school, such as supportive friends and family, and professors who wrote recommendations. These people already have a stake in your success!

The Alumni Connection

John Marshall alumni can provide valuable career advice. A CSO counselor can assist you with identifying alumni in a given location or practice area.

Another way to search for alumni in particular practice areas, cities, or law firms is through Martindale (at www.martindale.com). Although Martindale is a very useful tool, keep in mind that it is predominantly used for attorneys in law firms (attorneys in government agencies, for example, are not listed) and law firms need to pay to have a listing. Therefore, many alumni will not be listed in Martindale.

The Student-Alumni Exchange is another excellent way to connect with alumni. Every fall, the John Marshall Alumni Association hosts this event. Make sure to speak with a career counselor about the best approach to meet alumni at this event.

Social Networking

Social media sites are wonderful resources when searching for a legal job. Social media provides a broader way to share your background and interests with employers and members of the legal community. In addition to providing contacts and job leads, social media sites such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook allow you to provide more in-depth information about yourself and showcase your legal knowledge. They also help you to research potential contacts or employers.

Although social networking sites are powerful resources, you must keep in mind that social media sites can also hurt your career if not used properly. You must always be professional on these sites and should never add any content online that could harm your reputation. Proceed with caution when adding any content and photos online!

Managing Your Online Reputation

Your introduction to the legal community begins while in law school. You must appear professional and have an impeccable personal and online reputation. Before you start building your reputation in the legal community, you must first check the status of your online reputation. Revisit all online profiles and scrub clean any information that may harm your reputation.

The next step is to “Google yourself” to figure out if there is anything online about you that you may have missed. If any embarrassing information about you has been posted by others, ask those who posted the information to remove it.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn was created strictly for professional networking purposes. If you don't yet have a profile on LinkedIn, you are strongly encouraged to create one. LinkedIn has hundreds of millions of profiles for people in different professions and is a wonderful resource for law students trying to build their network of contacts.

LinkedIn allows you to add information about your educational and work experience. Unlike paper résumés that are limited in space, your profile on LinkedIn can be longer and more thorough. You can also post your résumé, writing samples, and other documents. This will allow you to share more information about yourself with employers and others. Once your profile is created, you can then “connect” to other people you know and join groups such as the alumni chapters of your schools, or organizations in which you are active. For each person with whom you link, you can see others with whom they are linked. Therefore, your network grows indefinitely each time you link with someone new.

Once you have the network of people you know in place, you can then ask your contacts to introduce you to other people on LinkedIn that you want to meet. For example,

if you are interested in working at a particular law firm, and you notice that a lawyer at that firm is linked to one of your contacts, you can ask your contact to provide an introduction through LinkedIn. By using your contact as the intermediary, you will have a better chance of success compared to cold calling that person. Most of the time, if you send a message that focuses on information gathering, such as “What is it like to work there?” or “I have an interview. What else might I expect?” people will respond kindly.

This introduction feature of LinkedIn has worked very well for many lawyers and law students to “get their foot in the door” with employers. It is also a useful tool if you are exploring different areas of law and would like to find practicing attorneys and meet with them for informational interviews. LinkedIn will not only provide you access to the attorneys profiles, but it will also allow you to see if you have a connection with that person. Sometimes reaching out to people you don't know will provide positive results. The People tab on LinkedIn will assist you with this type of search.

Another benefit of LinkedIn is its “Jobs” feature. You can search for jobs, using the “Jobs You May Be Interested In” function, which is a great way to identify potential employment opportunities.

Remember: Any information you put on the site will be available to potential employers. Therefore, don't be surprised if during an interview an employer brings up something about your background that was not on your résumé. Also, make sure to keep your profile up-to-date!

When creating your LinkedIn Profile, be aware that claims you make there could have ethical implications. Be careful about statements you make about legal skills you may possess. Avoid stating that you are in the “legal profession.” Turn off the section where other professionals can endorse you for your skills and provide recommendations. All of these types of representations on LinkedIn could be construed to mean that you are engaging in the unauthorized practice of law.

Facebook and Twitter

Facebook and Twitter are convenient and powerful ways for people to stay connected socially. These sites are often used by professionals to network. Many legal employers and organizations have Facebook pages to stay connected and distribute information. For example, John Marshall's Career Services Office has a Facebook page to provide updated information to students and graduates. Students are encouraged to join legal professional groups via social networking sites and log on often to take advantage of the information they provide.

Remember: *Even if you only use Facebook and other social networking sites for strictly personal reasons, you need to be aware that employers and others in the legal community may be trying to access your information. Therefore, use high security settings to limit who can access your information.*

Twitter is very popular in the legal world. Many attorneys use Twitter to find clients, get referrals from other attorneys, and build their reputation. You should start following the tweets of others in the legal world that are practicing in areas you hope to pursue. You can follow interesting legal discussions and learn about new legal programs or developments in the law as they are occurring. There is also a resource called Tweetup, which is a networking event where people on Twitter from the same geographic location with similar interests, can meet one another in person at a designated time and place. It is a good networking opportunity, as you never know who exactly you will meet and what may come from the meeting.

Twitter is also helpful with job leads and changes in the legal market. Many people, companies, and firms solely tweet about job openings, or retweet on behalf of others looking for work, such as the *Chicago Daily Law Bulletin*. Do a search on Twitter for law firms, and follow them. You can also use an application like TweetDeck to help manage the various Twitter feeds. Even just following the tweets of a practicing attorney about their day-to-day routine will allow you to get a better idea of what it is like to practice in particular areas of law. Two legal pages to start exploring immediately are LexTweet and LegalBirds.

Final Thoughts

Social networking is a great way to grow your network, but it is very important to get out and meet people face-to-face. Also, keep in mind that it helps to use social networks together. For example, if you post something to LinkedIn, you should then tweet about it. If others retweet it, then you might end up with more followers, which sometimes will lead to an inquiry or perhaps a new contact to add to your network.

Do not forget that once information is available through the Internet, it cannot be easily retrieved and may one day create problems for you. The more information you share online, the more information employers and legal professionals will have with which to judge you professionally. Think before you post!

Finally, results are not instantaneous. The key is to stay active and be patient. Job hunting can sometimes be frustrating, but social networking can make it fun and rewarding. When you participate in a Tweet-Up or another event found through a social network, it makes the experience more enjoyable. There are plenty of people out there who want to help and social networking is a great way to bring people together to better help each other.