

Embrace the Power of Networking

By SARA J. O'BRIEN

Lately, I have found myself spending more and more time on LinkedIn. Perhaps it is a natural progression of aging (both personally and professionally) that we find ourselves redirected away from one form of social media and drawn into another, or perhaps it is a side effect of the COVID-19 pandemic when we were forced to network online rather than in-person. Either way, it has proven benefits, which I have only begun to realize by committing myself to a networking platform that emanates positivity and growth.

A few months ago, I attended the Northeast Regional Professional Development Conference for Young Lawyers, which included a seminar discussion on the Lawyer's Guide to Social Media Success presented by Ryan McKeen and Karen Vladeck. They discussed how social media has become a powerful tool for communication, networking, and business development, and encouraged lawyers to embrace the opportunities platforms like LinkedIn provided to its users. It starts with one post. It doesn't have to be fancy. It doesn't have to change the world. And it doesn't have to draw in a million-dollar case. All it takes is a few authentic words appearing next to your profile picture and populating in your connections' feeds.

For some, this can be an intimidating and even stress-inducing exercise, but the benefits are proven and it's worth at least trying. It is something I have been working on myself—to stop worrying how others may perceive my posts and to just start the dialogue about the things I'm working on, topics that interest me, or the things I

am learning. Connecticut is a small state. The Bar is a small community. Being able to learn from and support one another in the legal world in which we live should be a top priority.

Participation in digital networking is not limited to the creation of new content but can also be accomplished by engaging in and reacting to conversations with others. Incrementally more, I am finding myself engaging in conversations with other practicing attorneys both in and out of state. I offer congratulatory comments on recent settlements or verdicts, and on promotions or career moves. I send out personal messages to connect where I think there could be mutual benefit to both parties. After all, you never know when you will be asked for a referral to counsel in another practice area or even another jurisdiction. It may feel strange at first, but it is no different than approaching a stranger at an in-person networking event. In my experience, people don't tend to shy away from a genuine outreach from a

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fellow professional, and for the younger attorneys out there, the generation that precedes us truly does want to leave the ladder down to help us climb.

This leads me to my next point: as lawyers, the public tends to give us a "professional hat" that we rarely have the chance to take off. Being a lawyer seems to be one of those professions where you are always on duty. There are few professions like it, but as soon as you are labeled as an attorney, you are rarely viewed as much else. You are the one with the answers. The one who can seamlessly resolve a dispute or navigate a complicated business transaction. Your childhood friends and long-lost family show up out of the woodwork to seek legal advice on questions that may or may not even be in your practice area. Without a solid network of colleagues and resources, this can be overwhelming and even time consuming.

As previously discussed, today's digital age provides an opportunity to grow and

expand in our professional network beyond just the geographical region in which we live, but there is still great importance to establishing a solid network within your own community, as well. Prior to my involvement with the Young Lawyers Section Executive Committee, I found professional networking to be a daunting exercise. At the encouragement of a friend, I joined the Executive Committee and have never looked back. Joining this organization has been one of the best professional decisions I have ever made for my career. It revolutionized my networking experience and enabled me to grow a network of colleagues practicing in all areas of law throughout Connecticut. I know my experience with the Executive Committee is not unique to me, and that many other members would likely agree. ■



For those who qualify for membership in the Young Lawyers' Section (under the age of 37 or have been a member of the Bar for less than 6 years), I would strongly encourage you to consider applying to the Executive Committee for the 2024-2025 Bar Year. Check out ctbar.org/YLS for more information. You won't regret it.



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