

Young Lawyers



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ROOM TO GROW

With this month's editorial theme focused on agricultural law, I am attempting what might seem impossible: relating agriculture to networking. What could agriculture and networking possibly have in common? More than you might think.

2015 is in full swing and the seasons are transitioning from winter to spring here in northern Nevada. With warm weather comes blossoming trees, blooming flowers and, for some, personal gardens.

Interestingly, gardening and networking have quite a bit in common. I propose that if you apply five essential gardening tips to your networking efforts as a young lawyer, you will cultivate a vibrant garden of valuable professional contacts.

1. Check Your Garden for Frost, Ice or Snow Damage

During a long winter, existing plants can accumulate frost, snow or ice damage. That damage must be tended to if that plant is to continue its growth in the spring.

Similarly, as busy professionals, an icy chill can settle over our networking. Weeks may pass while we focus solely on work or family. There is certainly nothing wrong with taking a break from networking. However, if you find that some time has passed since you actively networked, look first to your strongest clients and contacts. Reconnect with

them and knock off that layer of ice.

For existing clients, one of my favorite things to do is set up a time when I can come and tour their businesses, meet key employees and learn about their passions. My warmest reception with clients has always been during office visits. Do not discuss any of the services you are providing; these meetings should focus solely on the clients and their passions.

2. Ensure Your Soil is Dry

The condition of the soil is critical to any beautiful garden. If it is wet or clumpy, many plants will have a difficult time taking root and growing. So, once the frosty ice has been cleared, you must set a good foundation in which your plants can take root and grow.

Where you spend your precious networking time is essentially the soil from which your network will grow. As such, where to expend your networking efforts is probably the most important networking decision you will make.

As a baby lawyer, I focused quite heavily on the traditional networking events: attorney socials, Rotary clubs and nonprofit boards. These activities have their place, but in my opinion, they should not be the focus early in your career. During the last year and a half, I have spent the majority of my networking time at start-up events, such as 1 Million Cups, House of Genius, Tedx Talks and Start-Up Weekend. I have found that the start-up market is underserved by attorneys and that the business owners are typically my age. Networking among like-minded peers of a similar age has paid large dividends. Identifying markets that are not saturated

and building meaningful relationships will create a fertile base from which to build a network.

3. Use Fertilizer

Fertilizers assist in growth. As with plants, you should fertilize your network. Early in my career, I read an excellent book: "How to Win Friends and Influence People." I highly recommend reading it, because it provided an excellent roadmap for developing professional relationships.

In a nutshell, networking is not about meeting people so that they will refer business to you. Rather, networking is about meeting people and identifying how you can help them fertilize their professional lives. Get to know your contacts. Identify areas of need, passion or hobby and figure out how you can help them connect with others to excel in those areas. I recently helped a fellow young lawyer get a dream job with a firm. It didn't help to increase my book of business; it helped to solidify a relationship. In the process, I made a contact for life.

4. Start a Compost Pile to use for Next Year's Fertilization

Creating a compost pile is a great strategy for maximizing your long-term fertilizer. By creating a compost pile today, you are ensuring you have fertilizer for use tomorrow.

Focus on assisting your contacts over an extended period, so that the relationship continues to grow over time. Networking is really a career-long endeavor. Identify how you can

assist your contacts and keep a journal of those needs. Every few months, reread the journal entries to remind yourself how you can improve your relationships. I met with one business contact to tour several properties that the contact's business leased to start-ups in Reno. The contact mentioned they were looking to expand their business leasing to the downtown area. About six months later, I met a contact who was looking for space downtown and I connected the two. Needs aren't necessarily fulfilled right away; the most rewarding connections are made well after the need has been discussed.

5. Always Allow Room for Growth When You Plant

Even the most successful gardens can become overgrown. When you make your connections, plan for growth so that one plant does not grow into another's space.

One of the best mentors I've had taught me to cultivate men and women in key professions in order to develop strong relationships: accounting, insurance, wealth advisor, real estate and medical. If you have a client with a need, chances are the need will arise in one of these five industries. Having one contact in each area ensures that you have a trusted referral source when a client need arises. By having just one contact in each industry, you ensure that each relationship will continue to grow over time and that you are not diluting the relationships by referring clients to more than one industry contact. This ensures each contact has room to grow.

There are many excellent resources that can help you hone your networking skills. These are the five tips that have worked best for me. I encourage you to educate yourselves on a variety of techniques and test each to see what networking strategies work best for you. **NL**