

Business & Careers

Get strategic when growing your network

From small talk, conversations can come big things



Gary Mitchell
The Coach

I trust you read the first part of this column in the Nov. 9 issue. If you didn't, you would be well advised to go back and look for it.

So you have done your research and you know where to find your target audience. This column will serve you in becoming more strategic in your approach to networking, and then becoming disciplined with your follow-up. Remember TSD: targeted, strategic and disciplined.

Networking

Before: Ask the organizers for a list of attendees. Identify those specific people you would like to meet. See if you know anyone who knows them who could make an introduction, your current clients and contacts, partners and



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on LinkedIn. Try to set up coffee meetings or other (depending on nature and timetable of event). One client used his BlackBerry to e-mail himself the profiles of the people he wanted to meet. That

way he knew a little something about them and also what they looked like. The more you can do to prepare and become strategic in your approach, the better results you will achieve.

While networking, get started by asking questions to get the conversation going. This is also a further opportunity to continue with your target market research. Ask questions like: "What do you

hope to gain from today?," "What brings you to this event?," "What other events do you attend and why?," and "What other organizations do you belong to and why?"

Not only will you be gathering general information about the market, you will begin to get a better understanding of who they are, and what are some of their challenges. The approach will alleviate the pain most lawyers feel with engaging in small talk. You will initiate real and genuine conversations. Questions to learn more about them include: "What has been your biggest challenge this past year?," "In working with law firms, what have you valued the most?," and "What have you valued the least?" When you take this approach you are demonstrating a real and genuine interest in them.

Using your "Story": This is often referred to as your "elevator speech," although I prefer the story term. Craft a message that tells the firm's story as well as your own. This is where you can include feedback from your clients that support the firm's key messages. Don't be afraid **Growth, Page 22**

Message: Writing skills seen as being weaker in younger lawyers

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need you to produce, we need you to wear a different hat.' "

Simon Chester, a partner in the litigation and business law groups at Toronto firm Heenan Blaikie, says that there is a built-in editing system at his firm. With lawyers often working in teams, there is the opportunity to have work read critically by colleagues, which helps improve the quality of work.

He says the firm will also send staff to courses or seminars on effective legal writing, and articling students and interns attend a series of continuing education programs run by both lawyers within the firm and external writing consultants.

Chester, chair of the ABA Law Practice Management Section's editorial advisory board, doesn't agree that the issue of poorly crafted arguments can be blamed entirely on the younger generation or on the influence of social media. He says that jargon is the "bane of legal" prose and argues that lawyers have always struggled to explain themselves clearly.

"I find lawyers writing, generally, to be problematic because it doesn't serve the audience,

The do-not list

Five corporate communication mistakes employees should avoid at all costs, courtesy of Joel Postman, principal of Socialized PR:

1. Misguided humour

"It's okay to be human, but so much humour skirts or directly confronts controversial and offensive areas, like gender, religion and politics," Postman observes "Many recent social media gaffes are the result of humour gone awry."

2. Getting too personal

"One of the biggest advantages of social media communications is the human element. People really like the idea that they can talk to 'a real person' through social media channels. Keep in mind, though, your first responsibility is the company. You can talk about the Super Bowl, or the coming weekend, or the weather, but keep references to alcohol or wild parties out of your communications when you are representing the company.

3. Ethical missteps

"Anonymous blog comments or slurs against competitors, for example, will be discovered and will

embarrass the company and possibly result in loss of business to the company and termination of the employee or agency."

4. You are the firm

"Whether using a corporate social media identity or a personal one, people sometimes forget they are identified with, and seen to represent, a company," Postman says. "We are in the 'always on' era and everything a corporate communications professional says, writes, blogs, tweets or posts to Facebook, can be seen as representative of the company."

5. It's out there. Forever

"Everything you post online can be instantly seen by, commented on and passed on to millions of people. Even if you delete it, it still lives on in archives, cache, screenshots and blog posts. Think very carefully before posting anything remotely controversial or risky. You cannot take it back."

whether that's a judge or it's a client," Chester said. "Historically, we've always had the challenge of persuading lawyers to say it more clearly, to communicate more effectively, and that challenge hasn't really changed

with the advent of social media. "It's not necessarily something I would lay on that generation."

Chester recently co-authored an article with Daniel Del Gobbo, who was called to the bar in July and started as an associate at

Heenan Blaikie in September, and was "extremely pleased with how well his prose fitted with mine."

Del Gobbo had studied English and says he has never encountered one of his peers adopting text speak in communications

with clients. In any case, anything he has written for the firm has been proofread at least once.

However, he concedes it's possible that younger lawyers do not write as well as lawyers did in the past.

"What you might see in their formal writing is that they do not have the vocabulary or the diction of, say, a lawyer 25 years ago, because there may be less occasion to use those words today."

South of the border, Bryan Garner, the president of LawProse Inc., says that when he is teaching at a seminar, he is often asked by more senior lawyers to specifically mention that the firm has a policy against using text-speak in written communications.

"People with a weak grasp of grammar or punctuation I think see the new formats as a way to not have to worry about their natural weakness," Garner said. "They think people will just let it slide."

"I assure you there are people who will not let you slide," said the editor-in-chief of *Black's Law Dictionary*. "There is a professional cost to nonstandard usage."

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Growth: Having a simple approach always works better

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to get a little personal. Include things that could be of common interest; family, travel, hobbies, etc. I refer to these as “touching points.” They keep the conversation flowing in a natural way. And they can become a point of connection you can refer to later in your follow-up. But in using this information, it’s not all delivered as a speech. You are merely creating a story which you can use to answer questions people will ask of you.

Two nuggets to walk away from every conversation: Your goal from every networking opportunity should be to gather one business nugget of information and one personal. Sometimes it won’t

always go that way. Perhaps your conversations will veer more to a personal level, or vice-versa. The idea here is to walk away with some reason to follow up.

The most basic goal is to meet new people that may have the potential to hire you, find out as much as you can that will provide you with an effective way to move the relationship forward, (find a reason to follow up with them).

Follow up

When you have followed the first two sections, you will have some information about them you can use in following up. Then it’s really about building in the disci-

pline to do it. I use the term Nike with my clients. When I say Nike, what comes to mind? Just do it.

■ When? 24-hour rule. Why wait? Follow up with them while you are still fresh in their mind.

■ How? E-mail and LinkedIn. Send them a quick and SHORT e-mail after the event and reference something you learned about them while talking. This will show them right off you can listen. Also, send them an invite to join your network on LinkedIn. This is a soft and easy way to keep in touch with them and know what is going on in their career. If you are really junior, you want to meet as many people in our target companies at the same stage of their career as

you. You can keep in touch easily on LinkedIn, until such time as they become a decision maker. That’s when you will have the potential to land the “big one.”

■ What next? The idea here is to move the relationship forward. Is there a pressing need you learned about? Why should they meet with you? What’s in it for them? Is this a matter of simply staying in touch? How much time should you invest in this relationship right now? The more you do this the better you will become at answering these questions, trusting your instincts and following through in building more relationships.

If this all seems simple and

straight forward, that’s because it is. You have likely heard of the expression “Keep it simple stupid,” or KISS. Well, I know for a fact that none of you are stupid, far from it. So how about this, “Keep it simple, smarty pants.”

Until next time, I wish you great success.

Gary Mitchell is the author of ‘Rain-dance, The Business Development Guidebook for Lawyers’ and founder of On Trac Coach. He can be reached at gary@ontraccoach.com or 604-669-5235.

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Lawyer tapped inner musician to build career

MICHAEL RAPPAPORT

An appointment to the bench is always an honour, but no judicial post could be as sweet as being named a judge on the now-defunct television show *Canadian Idol*.

Indeed, Zack Werner has had many gigs in his multifaceted career—rock star, entertainment lawyer, talent manager, record producer and marketing maven—but he still looks back fondly on his five-year stint as a judge on CTV’s hit show from 2003 to 2008.

In an interview with *The Lawyers Weekly*, Werner admits that, in auditioning for the part, he was “absolutely terrible.” Nonetheless, he believes his legal background served him well on the show.

“The ability to analyze issues, to have confidence in your judgment and to get to the bottom line quickly, are skills I honed as a lawyer,” Werner says.

While presiding on *Canadian Idol*, “Justice Werner” was distinguished on the bench for his acerbic wit, candid comments and fabulous hair.

Zack Werner was born Isaac Werner in Winnipeg. His first passion was not law but music. His mother was an opera singer and teacher and Werner began playing piano and performing on stage at an early age. After graduating with a B.A. in English literature and theatre from the University of Minnesota, he discussed with his father his musical career ambitions. “What are you going to do all day while being a musician at night?” his father, a prominent businessman, retorted.

“Rather than get a day job waiting tables or tending bar, I decided to go to law school,” Werner says. At the University of British Columbia, he met many musically gifted law students and formed a cover band, The Negligents, which played at



Werner

Profile

NAME

Zack Werner

LAW SCHOOL

University of British Columbia

CALLED TO THE BAR

1987

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

1993 Began practising entertainment law for Sanderson, Taylor

1997 Co-founded Venus Management and Venus Records

2003–2008 Judge on the now-defunct show *Canadian Idol*

dances, parties and other gigs.

Werner article on Bay Street at the now defunct Woolley Dale & Dingwall. After his call to the bar in 1987, he formed the band Thick As Thieves and relocated to Los Angeles. The group opened for Alice In Chains and Pearl Jam and scored a distribution deal with BMG.

About five years later, after the band broke up, Werner relocated

to Toronto, in part because his wife was a Torontonian and in part because he could practise law in Ontario. “Having a fallback position is a terrible way to pursue an extreme career,” Werner concedes, adding: “I was on the edge of turning 30 and felt it was time to move on.”

He called every entertainment lawyer in Toronto and heard the same story: The market is saturated. There are no jobs.

Finally, Paul Sanderson, who wrote the book on entertainment law (according to his website), let Werner set up a desk in the hallway of the office of Sanderson Taylor (now Sanderson Entertainment Law) to try to start his practise. With his extensive contacts in the music scenes in Los Angeles, New York and Toronto, Werner was able to specialize in doing record deals. His clients included the Philosopher Kings, Chris Smith Management, Sky, Ron Sexsmith and Sass Jordan.

After about six or seven years as an entertainment lawyer, Werner made the transition from providing legal advice to managing talent. In 1997, he co-founded Venus Management and Venus Records, which has represented Esthero, Robin Black, Ali Milner, Down With Webster and the Johnstones.

“When we signed Esthero, it was the largest deal ever signed in Canada,” Werner says. Esthero is a Canadian singer-songwriter, born Jenny-Bea Englishman in Stratford, Ont.—which makes her the second most successful performer to hail from Stratford after “the Biebs.”

Werner, who lost his father to ALS, commonly known as Lou Gherig’s Disease, is heavily involved with many charities, including the ALS Society of Canada, Epilepsy Ontario and the Hospital for Sick Children.