

# Getting Comfortable with Effective Networking

By CINDY M. CIESLAK

**O**ver the past couple of years, I have been often asked what advice I would give to law students and younger attorneys. My response remains consistent: new and prospective attorneys should get comfortable with effective networking. Candidly, I was very uncomfortable with networking during law school and even for a few years following my admission to the bar. I only became comfortable with networking once I understood the purpose of networking beyond exchanging business cards. Through my involvement with the Young Lawyers Section, as well as various discussions with valuable mentors, I became familiar with effective networking techniques and strategies.

Effective networking is more than being able to recite what we do and what we are good at; it is about engaging in memorable conversations and making lasting connections. Some of this will involve learning more about the person with whom we speak instead of educating them about ourselves. In order to learn about others, we must ask questions and engage in meaningful conversations. I often suggest that law students and attorneys practice effective networking by asking questions of family, friends, and colleagues with whom they are comfortable so that they can be prepared, confident, and comfortable asking questions of a new acquaintance so that the discussion may progress beyond what we do day-to-day at our jobs. If a connection is established beyond the “surface-level,” then we will have talking points allowing us to build upon that foundation in future

*Cindy M. Cieslak is the chair of the CBA Young Lawyers Section for the 2020-2021 bar year. She is a partner at Rose Kallor LLP in Hartford, where she focuses her practice on labor & employment litigation as well as independent workplace investigations. She graduated summa cum laude from Penn State University in 2009 and received her JD from UConn School of Law in 2012.*



**“...if new attorneys are not taking advantage of networking opportunities, they could be missing out on an opportunity to meet a potential mentor.”**

conversations, thereby making a distinct and lasting impression.

Of course, part of making a lasting connection will, at the appropriate time, include the natural progression of how the individuals within the conversation can add value or otherwise benefit each other’s goals, either personally or professionally. But oftentimes, effective networking does not begin with this part of the discussion, and that is precisely where young attorneys sometimes struggle—they want to make an instant connection that will immediately progress their career without taking the time to cultivate a lasting relationship that could be beneficial in the long run.

I am at this unique point in my career—I am not a brand-new attorney, but I also know that there is plenty more to learn and significant room for growth. There-

fore, I not only give this advice, but I regularly practice it.

This past year has been interesting as we learned how to practice law virtually. However, we have not lost a year of networking simply because we have not been able to go into courts, attend meetings, or enjoy in-person cocktail hours. Although it required some creative thinking, professional organizations have been able to keep its members connected through socially distanced events such as hiking and golf, as well as numerous virtual events, including trivia nights, speed networking, murder mystery parties, escape rooms, fireside chats, book clubs, Zoom cocktail-making hours, educational panel discussions, and events that encouraged critical and timely discussions regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion. If you have not yet participated in one of these events, I highly encourage you to register

for one and bring a friend! If you are like me, you are starving for a little more social interaction.

As I mentioned in my initial article this bar year, I believe the pandemic has had and will continue to have an impact on the ability for young attorneys to benefit from mentorship. Further, if new attorneys are not taking advantage of networking opportunities, they could be missing out on an opportunity to meet a potential mentor. Although I have high hopes that we will soon be able to engage in the more traditional type of networking events, there is no reason to wait for that time to come when great opportunities for networking currently exist. And remember, the techniques and strategies we utilize to effectively network should not be reserved only for circumstances that are specifically coined as “networking” events, but rather, we can build relationships with every person with whom we talk. ■

Image credit: Ani\_Ka/DigitalVision Vectors



## Serving the Needs of the Connecticut Legal Community

Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers – Connecticut, Inc. (“LCL-CT”) is a Connecticut non-profit corporation created to provide assistance to Connecticut lawyers, judges and law students who experience substance use disorders, mental health issues, stress, age-related problems or other distress that impacts the individual’s ability to function personally and professionally.

LCL services are available at no cost to all attorneys, judges and law students in the State of Connecticut.

All LCL services are strictly confidential and protected under C.G.S. §51-81d(a), as amended.

**Visit our website: [www.lclct.org](http://www.lclct.org)**

**Contact LCL today for FREE, CONFIDENTIAL support  
HOTLINE: 1-800-497-1422**