



# Network Like a Boss

BY ALEXANDRA B. MCLEOD, ESQ.

**I've been collecting anecdotal research in preparation to write this article, asking many friends and colleagues, "What does it mean to say that someone 'knows how to work a room?'" The answers have been varied, but if there was any consensus, at least among my lawyer friends, it is that it is much like Justice Potter Stewart's test for obscenity – hard to define, but you know it when you see it.<sup>1</sup>**

In prep school, it dawned on me that there were unspoken societal and professional rules that were passed down but were not written in any book and must be learned by experience. Many of my prep school classmates had unknowingly been networking for years, with the children of the professionals who were networking with their own parents. "Working the room" came easily to these classmates, and I began to make a study of the behaviors they seemed to grow up inherently knowing.

The rest of us have been counseled incessantly that networking is *very important*, but never taken aside and actually taught *how* to do it. My own dad worked at the same



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company for more than 30 years, and my mom stayed at home to raise us. They had no need to network and no networking how-to's to give. My brothers and I, first-generation college graduates ourselves, recurrently discuss the challenge of turning party small talk into fruitful, professional leads and contacts. Being the oldest, and therefore having the most time served in the professional realm, I give my brothers the best advice I have to give. After two decades of attempted networking, this is the same advice I give mentees and young lawyers. This is the same advice I am about to give you, dear reader.

## 1. Seek and Find an Organization that Interests You

There are so many valuable community organizations, as well as legal associations and affinity bars, from which to choose. In our fast-paced world, one of our most precious commodities is our time, and you get to choose where you will spend it beyond work and home. Perhaps there are groups with religious affiliation or other charities that interest you. Think: volunteer church service or youth groups, Catholic charities, bible or other religious study, or working in women's or homeless shelters. Affiliation with any such groups can expand your perspective and your contacts, although it may prove more challenging to dovetail those connections with professional networking. There are numerous community groups for the civic or politically minded, such as Rotary Club, Red Cross, Toastmasters, or area political clubs. You could turn a favorite or new-found hobby into a network such as a regular yoga or exercise class, or a hiking group.

As lawyers, legal associations and affinity bars are an obvious choice to invest your time and build your professional network. The State Bar of Nevada has 26 sections, such as the Family Law Section. There also seems to be an affinity bar suited to every area of practice or attorney's background or interest. You might join the Clark County Bar Association, Nevada Justice Association, or the Las Vegas Defense Lawyers. You might join the Latino, National, or South Asian bars. You are hereby cordially invited, dear reader, to join me at the Southern Nevada Association of Women Attorneys (SNAWA) whether you identify as a woman lawyer or an ally to women lawyers. Or come to the bench-bar meetings to ask questions, keep in touch with colleagues, and become acquainted with judges off the bench.

Chances are that someone in your firm, circle, or network is already involved in one of these organizations. Ask your friends and colleagues where and with whom they are involved and *why*. Find out what others like about the organization, its

membership, and/or its mission. Maybe the club gets you outdoors, maybe the volunteer work is rewarding, or maybe the organization throws the best parties. Whatever it is, tag along with others and try several organizations on for size. Join the few organizations, clubs, or specialty bars you find that best fit your lifestyle, time commitment, and interests. And don't forget to extend invitations to others, inviting friends or mentees to check out your favorites and share your positive experiences with them.

## 2. Make a Name for Yourself

An essential part of networking is getting your name out there and getting to know the names of others. So, attend meetings and events armed with plenty of business cards, as well as a digital contact card you can share easily. I keep a fancy business card holder in my purse, but usually at an event, I move cards into a pocket for ease. In pre-COVID-19 times, I kept cards in my left pocket so I could give out a card with my left hand and shake with my right.

**More tips:** it is always easier (read: less awkward) to ask someone for *their* card or details first, then you can "reciprocate" with your own card or contact information. Use your new acquaintance's name several times in the conversation; this will help you commit their name to memory and will make the other person feel good around you.<sup>2</sup> As soon as possible following your introduction, in the car or back at your office, write down what you learned about your new acquaintance, such as the event where you met, details they shared about their legal practice, family, or hobbies. Review those details before you attend the next event to help you move beyond small talk and strengthen your connection when you next see that person. Send follow-up emails remarking how much you enjoyed meeting them or sharing that recent case law or article you discussed. Bonus: This gets your contact information in their inbox.

## 3. Mix, Mingle, and Talk to Someone New

Here is the best definition of "working the room" I received in my quest to unlock the networking mystery: enthusiastic interaction with others in attendance, engaging one-on-one enough to form a

connection, but moving among everyone so that no one is neglected.<sup>3</sup>

While it may be comfortable to attend or catch up with friends or colleagues from your own firm or who you already know, that defeats the purpose. Get out of your comfort zone and sit in the empty seat at the judges' table. Keep an eye out for someone attending alone or standing off by themselves; they may be even more shy than you, and you can be the one who reaches out to make a connection. If you do attend with a colleague you already know, split up to meet new people and then introduce those people to your colleague and vice versa – you will both meet twice as many people that way.

## 4. Set a Goal or Challenge

Sometimes you simply do not feel "on," and putting forth the effort for a networking event seems daunting. Turn the event into a game, and challenge yourself to meet three new people, schedule a follow-up lunch or happy hour, or get five new business cards. If you are interested in making a specific connection, maybe to a new judge or to the attorney who argued that recent appeal, consider whether you already know someone who can facilitate that introduction. Even if you are networking to meet professional goals, you can still have some fun.

## 5. Lean in and Get Involved

Finally, once you've found a "home" at one of the many worthy organizations out there, get involved. Say "yes!" Put the events on your calendar and attend whenever your schedule allows – even if you need to come late or leave early. Volunteer to help with an event or participate on a committee. For example, working the check-in table is a great way to meet lots of people and say hello to everyone who attends. Knowing you have pre-committed to help can motivate you to attend even when you are having an "off" day and would otherwise skip the event and head home. When you keep showing up, get to know others, and lean in, there will be opportunities for even greater involvement, such as participating on the board.

Looking forward to bumping into you, dear reader, at the next event and making a new connection.

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ALEXANDRA MCLEOD is an AV-rated attorney with two decades' experience in Nevada, currently working as a trial lawyer at NETTLES | MORRIS. She currently serves as one of the vice presidents of the Southern Nevada Association of Women Attorneys (SNAWA), chairs the Eighth Judicial District Court Civil Bench-Bar Committee, is a member of the Clark County Bar and the Nevada Justice Associations, and volunteers as the children's chorister in her local church. She is eager to make your acquaintance!



**ENDNOTES:**

1. *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, 378 U.S. at 197 (1964) (Stewart, J., concurring) (explaining why the material at issue in the case was not obscene under the *Roth* test, and therefore was protected speech that could not be censored).
2. Feel-good hormones, such as dopamine and serotonin, are released into your brain when your ears encode that your name has just been said aloud.
3. I'm paraphrasing.



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