

## NETWORKING, JOB POSTINGS, AND TARGETED MAILINGS

### *How to Find a Great Job*

Once you have determined what you want to do with your law degree, you will need to develop a productive job search campaign that will enable you to identify prospective employers in your field(s) of interest and desired geographic location, and effectively market yourself to those employers. There are a number of methods to consider when planning your job search strategy — some more effective than others. Given the limited amount of time law students have to devote to their job search, you will want to concentrate on those efforts that will most likely produce the highest pay off — an offer of employment.

There are three basic approaches to the employment market — networking and informational interviewing, responding to job postings, and targeted mailings. You will find yourself relying on all three to uncover openings in your area(s) of interest.

### *I. Networking and Informational Interviewing*

Contrary to popular belief, most job openings are not filled via advertisements in newspapers or online job boards. Most career advisors agree that only 20 percent of all available positions are advertised. Therefore, you will increase your chances of finding a position if you are able to gain access to what is known as "the hidden job market." It is no coincidence that the majority of this resource enumerates the approaches to and merits of networking and informational interviewing. These two steps are the best and most effective job searching techniques.

One of the most effective ways to find a legal job through the "hidden job market" is by networking and informational interviewing. Networking activities may be as simple as having lunch with a friend or family member, volunteering at a local legal services agency or attending bar association meetings. Through networking, you will develop relationships with people connected to your field of interest with whom you may conduct informational interviews or just call with a quick question. Meeting lawyers and other professionals who can provide you with advice and insight into your area of interest may prove to be your single most valuable resource in your job search. It is important to remember that networking goes both ways and you will most likely be called upon to reciprocate at some point.

Informational interviewing is perhaps the most useful networking activity to utilize and a valuable tool in career development. This is the process of meeting with practitioners for the purpose of gaining information about career choices and the job search process. It is crucial to remember that these informational meetings are distinct from interviewing for an existing job.

The benefits of networking and informational interviewing are numerous:

- ✿ Gaining first-hand information on the day-to-day activities of a professional in the field
- ✿ Building confidence in your ability to discuss your strengths, goals and career interests
- ✿ Expanding your professional network and becoming known by "players" in the field
- ✿ Learning about career paths you didn't know existed
- ✿ Clarifying, defining and redefining your interests and goals

- ✿ Gaining interviewing experience: the more comfortable you become with the process, the less stress you will experience
- ✿ Researching particular firms or agencies through meeting with current employees
- ✿ Becoming a more impressive job candidate by learning what is important to employers
- ✿ Learning more about the job market outlook for your area of interest
- ✿ Obtaining new contacts for informational interviews and names of professional organizations and publications which may be helpful to you in your career
- ✿ Becoming familiar with salary structures within your field of interest
- ✿ Increasing your opportunities to access unadvertised job opportunities

### **Developing your Network: Making Contacts**

Effective networking begins with “contacts.” Potential contacts include any people with whom you have a relationship (direct or indirect), who may be in a position to provide you with valuable “insider information.” As you begin to think of possible contacts, it may help to group people in three general categories: personal contacts (friends, family), professional contacts (previous and current employers) and educational contacts (faculty members, alumni of your schools).

It is very important to remember that a contact does not have to be in a position of power (i.e., a hiring attorney) in order to help you in your job search. Contacts can offer advice and, provided they are impressed with you, act as additional eyes and ears in your job search. This is how the "hidden job market" becomes a reality. Contacts provide you with inside information about job openings that may never be advertised. Furthermore, if you and your contact develop a good rapport, your contact may add his or her influence to your candidacy when you do apply for a position. And, even if a networking contact cannot offer a job lead (and many will be unable to do so), you can still glean valuable information from them that will enhance your knowledge base and enhance your candidacy with potential employers.

Keep in mind that everyone you encounter connected to your law school experience, including faculty members, alumni, individuals you work with at part-time jobs, people you meet during clinical programs, or a student you meet through a competition, is a potential networking contact. Therefore, it is important to establish good relationships with these individuals. For example, if you hold a part-time summer job at the State House and a particular individual has been instrumental in making the experience worthwhile, write this individual a thank you note at the end of the summer. These small gestures will help you begin to develop a networking base.

### **List of Possible Contacts**

Now that you understand the benefits of networking and informational interviewing, it’s time to begin compiling your list of contacts. Remember, your contacts do not have to be working in the legal field. They probably know people who do. Here is a list to help you get started.

- |                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| ✿ Family                    | ✿ Fellow Law Students                         |
| ✿ Friends                   | ✿ Undergraduate Faculty                       |
| ✿ Previous Employment       | ✿ Undergraduate Classmates                    |
| ✿ Current Employment        | ✿ Fraternity/Sorority Members                 |
| ✿ SULS Faculty              | ✿ Alumni Associations (law and undergraduate) |
| ✿ Law School Administrators | ✿ Professional Associations                   |
| ✿ SULS CDO Staff            |   |

- ⊗ Community Activities
- ⊗ Religious Groups
- ⊗ Neighbors
- ⊗ Customers/Clients

- ⊗ Athletic Teams/Health Clubs

Once you have exhausted your memory, share your list with family and friends. Perhaps you've left off an uncle who just happens to be a family law attorney in New York City? Your family and friends may think of people you've missed and may be able to help put you in touch with some of the people you've listed.

Other potential sources of contacts include:

- ⊗ Suffolk University Law School's Online Alumni Career Network: The Career Development Office has collected names of alumni who have offered to speak with students who are interested in their area of specialization
- ⊗ A Lexis or Westlaw search of attorneys: Generate a list of possible contacts in a particular practice area (your search can be refined to seek Suffolk Law graduates, or graduates of your undergraduate school, who practice in your area of interest)
- ⊗ Professionals who have been featured in legal publications such as the Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly: Consider contacting such individuals to express interest in them and request a meeting
- ⊗ Speakers and panelists: Seek out professionals who have spoken at law-related programs you have attended

### **How to Set Up an Informational Interview**

Once you have developed a list of contacts, you should begin arranging "informational interviews." Initially, it is likely that you will be more comfortable setting up meetings and networking with people with whom you already have a relationship. Meeting with these individuals first will help you build momentum before you start contacting people who you consider to be strangers.

#### ***The Initial Contact: By Phone, By Letter or By Email?***

Often, law students ask: "Should I make my first contact by phone, letter or email?" The reality is that there are positive aspects to all these methods of contacting people. Put simply, writing is the safer route and calling or emailing are the quicker routes. Following are some guidelines that will help you to decide whether you should phone or write:

#### **Consider calling or emailing first if...**

- ⊗ The person is a contact whom you have met
- ⊗ You worked with the individual a few years ago and developed a friendly rapport
- ⊗ You are contacting someone you recently met at a professional meeting and the contact gave you his/her business card and suggested you call or email him/her to speak further
- ⊗ You are comfortable, articulate and succinct on the phone with people you don't know well or at all. Or, in the case of email, that you craft the communication in a professional and business-like manner

If you choose to call first, be prepared with your introduction. For example, "Ms. Smith, my name is Lucy Brown and we met last week at the Massachusetts Bar Association meeting. As you may recall, I'm currently in my second year at Suffolk Law School and

am interested in learning more about family law. I found our conversation very interesting and wonder if you might have 10 or 15 minutes for me to drop by your office. I'd like the opportunity to hear more of your advice and ideas about entering the field."

### Consider writing a letter first if...

- ✿ The individual knows nothing or next to nothing about your background
- ✿ You saw the name in the Alumni Career Network or the Alumni Directory
- ✿ You listened to the person speak on a panel
- ✿ An acquaintance suggests that you to contact his/her friend/contact
- ✿ You found the contact through a computer search

If you decide to write a letter, you should plan to follow the letter with a phone call or email about one week later and remember to reference the letter in your phone conversation or email message. Your letter must not sound like a cover letter seeking a job with your contact's firm or organization. If it does, you may end the relationship before it ever gets off the ground. Most of your contacts will not have a job to offer you and may be apprehensive that a job is all you are after. Therefore, try to avoid using the word "interview" in your letter; it implies that you are seeking more than information and advice. Instead, introduce yourself and stress your desire to seek only guidance and information during a meeting with your contact. Also, do not include your resume with your letter, although you might consider bringing it to your meeting and asking your contact to review it for comments and suggestions for improvement.

### *Sample Letter*

Always include the name of any mutual acquaintance in the first paragraph of your letter (particularly if the person you are writing to is an indirect contact and a mutual acquaintance referred you to him/her). In the second paragraph, explain why you think a meeting would be beneficial to you. You should also include any relevant work experience you possess. In your final paragraph, indicate you will be calling within the next week to schedule a brief meeting. Do not request more than 20 minutes of your contact's time.

555 Hill Road  
Boston, MA 02111  
October 17, 20xx

Charlie Brown, Esq.  
Brown, Red and Green, LLP  
123 Second Avenue  
Worcester, MA 01610

Dear Mr. Brown:

I am currently a second year student at Suffolk University Law School interested in pursuing a career in Criminal Law. Through a search of our Alumni Network Register, I learned that you practice in this field and I would very much appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about your career.

The combination of my work experience and educational background demonstrates my strong interest in Criminal Law. After completing my undergraduate degree in Criminal Justice, I spent five years working as a Boston Police Officer. As a law student, I have taken Evidence and Criminal Law, and I will participate in Suffolk's Voluntary Defenders clinical program next year. Additionally, I was an intern at the Suffolk District Attorney's Office last summer, and the practical experience I gained there only increased my desire to become a criminal law attorney. I am sure that I would benefit from your advice, as both a Suffolk University Law School alum and a practitioner, as I continue to plan for a career in Criminal Law.

I will call you during the week of October 24, 20xx to speak with you about arranging a brief meeting at your convenience. Thank you very much for your time and consideration of this request. I look forward to meeting with you and hearing more about your work.

Sincerely,

Law Student

### **Preparing for the Meeting: Research Your Contact and Develop Your "Three-Minute Story"**

It is essential that you thoroughly prepare for your informational meetings. Having a specific purpose and agenda planned for each meeting you organize will ensure that you leave the meeting with helpful information and that you make a positive impression on your contact. Research your contact and his/her area of practice prior to the meeting, using information in the Career Development Office and/or resources available online. Learning about the area of practice through published information will allow you to devote more time during your meeting to the personal insights of the interviewee and to develop a rapport with that individual. Doing your homework will impress your contact and it will be more likely that you will leave his/her office with names of additional contacts.

In addition to performing research, you should develop a three-minute story to use when networking and requesting informational meetings. Your three-minute story is a response to the infamous interview question, "Tell me a little bit about yourself." It may also be used when introducing yourself to others in networking situations. This is a statement that needs to be well thought out before you make contact with someone, written or spoken, to ensure that you make a good first impression. You should provide the listener with the following information:

- ⊗ Your education/experience level

- ✿ A brief summary of previous, relevant employment, including the type of work you performed and skills you have developed
- ✿ A short explanation of your desired career path

Ideally, your three-minute story will not only provide your contact with the necessary information to form an impression as to what type of work you would be well-suited for, but it will also lead them to believe that you are focused and have your act together.

### ***Sample Three-Minute Story***

“Hello, my name is Lucy Powers and I am a third-year evening student at Suffolk University Law School. I am very interested in pursuing a career in Health Care Law and have been focusing my studies in this area. Since graduating from college, I obtained my Masters in Pharmacology from Ohio State University and then spent two years working as a pharmacist at a CVS located in Cambridge. I am currently working as a pharmacist at Mass General Hospital, where I am responsible for ensuring that our drug distribution system complies with Federal and State regulations. At Suffolk, I have taken several courses in Health Law and it is my goal to eventually work as in-house counsel for a health care facility.”

### **The Meeting: You are the Interviewer!**

After having made your list of contacts, researched their organizations and prepared your three-minute story, you are now ready to conduct your first informational meeting. Remember, you are not interviewing for a job, but rather the purpose of this meeting is to gather information that will take you closer to your goal of getting a job. In this situation, you are the interviewer and it is your responsibility to direct the discussion. Your two main goals for each informational interview should be (1) making a positive impression upon your contact, and (2) leaving the interview with additional names of people you can contact.

### **General Protocol**

- ✿ Present yourself as you would during an actual job interview: dress appropriately and bring your resume to the meeting
- ✿ Have a purpose and agenda: state your purpose early on (e.g. to gather information on a career in corporate law)
- ✿ Be prepared to share your three-minute story
- ✿ After giving a brief presentation of yourself (your “three-minute story”), focus on the other person: design questions to elicit information about an area of practice, players involved, qualifications required, tips for entering the field, the practice of law in the contact’s geographic location, and the like
- ✿ Feel free to take a list of prepared questions and do not hesitate to engage in conversation to show the interviewer you have done your homework
- ✿ Bring a copy of your resume and ask for feedback and suggestions for improvement
- ✿ Always try to get a referral (name, place or journal) before you end the meeting
- ✿ Remember to ask for the individual’s business card so you will have the correct contact information for writing a thank you note and future communications
- ✿ Keep the meeting to the time limit initially requested – no matter how well it appears to be going; your contact will respect that you are using his/her time efficiently

### **Sample Questions to Ask**

As stated above, your goal is to acquire basic information through an enjoyable conversation with your contact. After introducing yourself, establish rapport with “ice-breaker” types of questions (mutual contacts, weather, office environment – or something else you have in common). Next, begin asking specific questions about your contact’s position and their personal career development. Here is a sample of questions you may wish to ask during your meeting.

- ✿ How did you obtain your current position?
- ✿ What has been your career progression since graduating from law school?
- ✿ What do you like the most about your job? the least?
- ✿ How do you spend your day?
- ✿ How much time do you spend researching?
- ✿ How much time do you spend with clients?
- ✿ Do your work place obligations extend outside of the standard work week?
- ✿ What kinds of skills are most essential for success in this field?
- ✿ Are there particular law school courses that you suggest?
- ✿ If you were a law student again, is there anything you might do differently?
- ✿ Do you have any suggestions as to where I might gain the experience I need for a job in this field?
- ✿ How receptive is a private firm to a candidate who has gained most of his/her experience in the public sector? (or vice versa)
- ✿ Do you have any suggestions for improvements on my resume?
- ✿ Based upon my resume and our discussion, how suited is my background for the work you do?
- ✿ What types of experiences, paid or volunteer, would you recommend to me?
- ✿ What should my salary expectations be?
- ✿ What is most rewarding about working in this field?
- ✿ Is this legal area growing? How do you see it changing over the next few years?
- ✿ Do you have suggestions regarding professional journals and associations that would put me in touch with people and information related to this area of practice?
- ✿ How do people learn about open positions in this area? Are such positions usually advertised, or are they often filled through word-of-mouth?
- ✿ Can you give me the names of other attorneys who may be helpful to me?
- ✿ May I use your name when I meet with others in this field?
- ✿ May I call you again?

### **After the Meeting: Thank You Notes and Continuing the Relationship**

***The Thank You Note:*** Send a thank you note after the meeting expressing your appreciation for your contact’s time and advice. In your note, mention something particularly informative you learned during the meeting and/or what further steps you plan to take in the near future as a result of your discussion. If the meeting went particularly well, consider asking your contact to keep you in mind if he/she hears of a position for which you might be well-suited.

***Continuing the Relationship:*** If you feel like the contact was receptive to helping you, consider touching base on an intermittent basis to let him/her know you are still exploring the field (e.g. send an article that you think would be of interest to him/her, email him/her with a quick update about a summer job you’ve obtained). While we encourage you to keep in touch with your contacts on a regular basis, be careful not to come across as being too pushy or a pest.

***Keeping a Record:*** It is important for you to keep a record of your networking activities. Use a notebook, index cards, or any other filing system that works well for you, to keep track of the following: the contact’s information (name, title, address, phone number, referral’s name if

applicable), date of your meeting, names and addresses of additional contacts received, helpful information received during the meeting, and dates you touch base with your contact after the initial meeting.

***It may also be helpful to take note of the following:*** What positive and negative impression do you now have of the area of practice? How did this interview help you to clarify your own objectives? What are your next steps? With whom will you speak next? What more do you now know about the legal market in your field of interest? As you continue to meet with your contacts, you will become more educated on your chosen field, and your questions for contacts may become more specific.

***And, once you secure a position:*** Be sure to inform all of the contacts with whom you have met of this good news. They will be pleased to know about your success and will feel a sense of gratification that they have been able to help you.

### **Final Thoughts on Networking and Informational Interviewing**

Networking and informational interviewing can help you develop a better understanding of the area of practice that interests you and may enable you to build your self-confidence in marketing your skills to employers in that area of specialization. As "practice interviews," informational interviews will enable you to meet employers and present yourself in a more relaxed atmosphere than in an actual interview. In discussing your career objectives with legal professionals, you will become more comfortable in presenting your qualifications. You will also learn more about what prospective employers are looking for in a successful candidate.

As you continue in this process, you will clarify and redefine your goals. It is therefore possible to become a more impressive candidate; you will know what you really want and why. In addition, you will have established a network that you can use again and again for a variety of professional purposes.

### ***II. Responding to Job Postings***

Another effective approach to learn about employment opportunities is to check the job postings on the CDO online recruiting database, Symplicity. Included are job opportunities for students and graduates searchable by practice settings and geography. Please see the CDO for login information. In addition, the office houses a variety of legal publications and newsletters which include position listings for attorneys. For those students interested in legal employment during the academic year, be advised that there tends to be a greater number of job opportunities listed at the beginning of each semester. If you are interested in summer job listings, check the summer job postings on a regular basis, especially after March 1<sup>st</sup>.

### ***III. Targeted Mailings***

Some law students feel compelled to send their resume to every firm in the *Martindale Hubbell Law Directories* or *Lawyers Diary* in an attempt to attract attention from employers. While targeted mailings may prove to be an effective approach to getting interviews, untargeted mass mailings are usually quite time consuming, costly and ultimately non-productive. Therefore, if you wish to execute an unsolicited bulk mailing, concentrate only on those employers with whom you

share some common denominator (e.g., a Suffolk graduate) or for whom your experience will be relevant.

### ***Your Job Search: A Final Note***

As mentioned earlier, as a law student you probably do not have an abundance of free time to devote to your job search. Accordingly, you should avoid wasting your time engaging in ineffective activity such as sending your resume to the same law firm more than once, doing unfocused mass mailings, or pursuing employment opportunities for which you are not qualified. Therefore, it is imperative that you conduct your job search in an organized and thoughtful manner.

And, in addition to applying for advertised positions, you should devote the lion's share of your time and energies networking with individuals to gain knowledge and referrals, and to unearth opportunities in the "hidden job market."

You should keep a record of the employers you have contacted including the dates of any correspondence or conversations, what was sent to the employer (your resume, transcript, etc.), any special information concerning the employer (e.g., a contact within the firm, specific opening vs. possible opening) and record the status of your application. This approach may save you time and possible embarrassment.