

SKILLS AREA RESOURCE SERIES

# NETWORKING AND INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

**WHAT IS NETWORKING?** Networking is building of professional contacts for business or employment purposes. The purpose of networking is to build long-term, professional relationships for professional development and personal growth. There is no time limit or deadline for networking, nor does the need to network end when you have secured employment. It is crucial, however, to begin networking as soon as you begin law school, if not before. Developing a personal network is an integral part of job searching. In fact, based upon student feedback to the Career Development Office, **networking is your best job search resource!**

## **HOW DO I START NETWORKING?**

Anyone can be a networking contact: the student sitting next to you in class, your parents' neighbor, your doctor, professor, former supervisors, or anyone with whom you have something in common (i.e., the same college, fraternity, sorority, gym, professional association).

- The CDO offers the Alumni Career Network, a database of GW Law alumni willing to help students/other alumni with their job search. To access the Network, make an appointment with a CDO career counselor.
- Use the 1L/2L summer surveys in the CDO Resource Library to contact students who have worked with organizations of interest to you.
- The CDO sponsors various programs throughout the year that can be used as networking opportunities.
- Take every opportunity to build your professional contacts. You can network while waiting in a grocery store line, riding the bus or metro, attending a professional seminar or CDO program or meeting with a professor.
- Professional organizations, bar associations and affinity or interest groups are great places to meet people.
- Talk to people about your career interests and goals. Most people are more than willing to share information with someone. In fact, most people are flattered by the attention and truly want to help.
- Follow-up on all referrals and keep your professional contacts apprised of your career status.

## **WHAT IS INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING?**

Informational interviewing is one way to build your network of professional contacts. It is also the process through which career planners and job seekers learn about career opportunities. Informational interviewing can provide:

- Insights into a career field of interest including skills needed, entry-level positions, employment trends, job opportunities, etc.
- A realistic view of the work world and career field you are investigating
- Assistance with academic planning
- Ideas for volunteer, summer, part-time, and internship opportunities related to specific fields
- Professional contacts and increased confidence in interacting with professionals
- A better chance of “being in the right place at the right time”
- A foot in the door
- Information about special concerns (i.e., salaries, part-time or flexible hours, diversity issues)

## **WHO CONDUCTS INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS?**

- Anyone seeking information about particular career fields or professional settings
- People seeking geographic information
- Applicants seeking information about opportunities for diversity candidates within an organization

Often, one is able to gather information through informational interviewing that cannot or should not be discussed in a formal job interview. For example, during an informational interview with a judge, it is appropriate to ask exactly what interning in his/her chambers may involve; however, if you are at a formal interview with a judge, you are expected to know the duties required of a law clerk.

## **DO'S OF INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING**

- Conduct a self-assessment prior to informational interviewing. Explore your interests, values, and skills so you will be better prepared to discuss them with others.
- Be honest with yourself and your contacts regarding your reasons for wanting to talk to them. An informational interview is not a job interview.
- Make appropriate contact. To introduce yourself, either call or write to the prospective contact. Ask for 20-30 minutes of their time. It is often more appropriate to write a letter in situations where you do not know the person well.
- Be prepared. Do your homework before meeting with the interviewee. Create a list of questions.
- Dress as if it were a job interview.
- Follow-up. Always write a thank-you letter. Keep the person up-to-date on your job search. Remember to let them know when you do find what you are looking for.
- Keep good records. Record details about your conversation so you can keep track of your contacts.

## **DON'TS OF INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING**

- Do not ask for a job. Information is what you are seeking.
- Do not be late or skip the appointment.
- Do not forget to send a thank-you letter after the meeting, and remember to follow-up.
- Try not to stay longer than 30 minutes.

**WHAT TO ASK IN AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW:** Ask questions about the organization, the career field, the person's background and career path, for advice for someone at your career stage, what they see for the future in their particular career field and for names of additional people with whom you can meet. Sample questions are:

- How did you get your job at (organization name)?
- Were you a summer associate/lateral hire?
- Did you have particular skills/background in the area in which you are working?
- How have you advanced within the organization? Does your organization promote from within? How long did it take you to make partner? How do you envision your future career path?
- What exactly does a (practice area) attorney do? What are the different aspects of the job?
- As a judicial clerk, how do you spend your day? Do you get to spend time with the judge, perform research, or attend court?
- What is the philosophy of your organization? Does your organization have employee training and support?
- What does your organization look for when hiring new attorneys/laterals/law clerks? What traits does a successful applicant possess?
- How is the job market for (career field) in (geographic location)? Are there areas of the law in (geographic location) that are considered "hot" or "up and coming" these days?
- What advice do you have for a recent graduate seeking to enter this field?
- Are there any professional associations I should join that would put me in contact with other women attorneys/minority attorneys/career changers/international attorneys?
- Do you know of any other people to contact who might be able to assist me with information?
- What is the typical salary range for a (position) with a (small/medium/large organization) in (geographic location)?
- Would you review my resume and provide feedback? Follow up by updating your resume, incorporating the suggestions and sending him/her a copy.

### **FOLLOW-UP**

- Always send a simple thank-you letter.  
Example: "Thank you so much for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me yesterday. I appreciate the information and advice you provided about the market for environmental attorneys in Houston. I will follow-up with Mr. Smith as you suggested and I have already called for information about the Women's Bar Association. Again, thank you for your time."
- Do not forget to let them know what happens to you.  
Example: "I am writing to thank you for your generous assistance during my recent job search. I met with Mr. Smith and he knew of several job possibilities. I interviewed with Larry Green at Blue, Clark & Jones and I was offered a position in their Natural Resources division. Thank you again for your help. I look forward to seeing you at the next Women's Bar Association meeting."
- Do not forget to continue to keep in touch, even after you get a job; you never know when you will need to use your network again, so maintain your networking contacts for future reference.