

Enlarge Your Territory

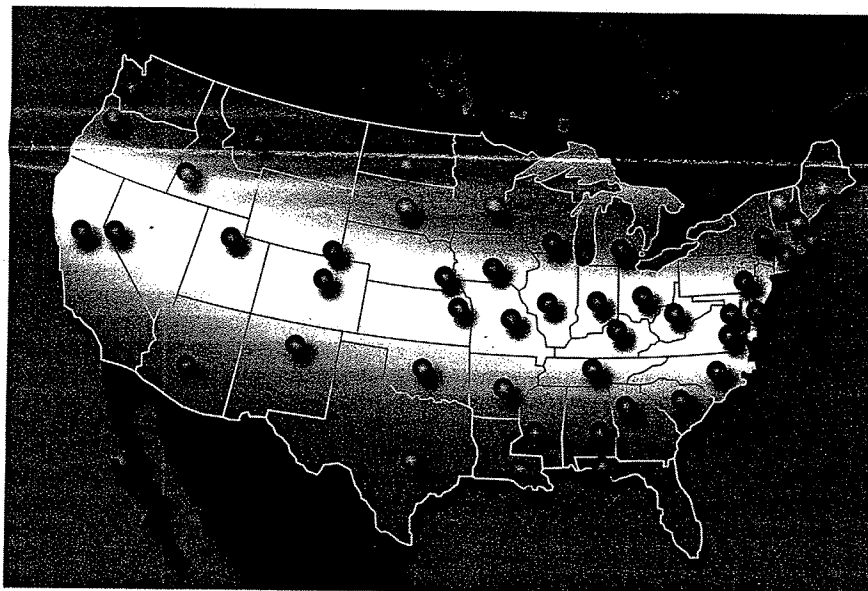
Networking increases contacts and opportunities. Think you can't do it because you're not a schmoozer? Not true. You can create friendships over time, starting right where you are now.

BY CECILIA B. LOVING

The Prayer of Jabez from *First Chronicles*, Chapter 4, Verse 10, has recently been one of the most quoted scriptures, made popular by Bruce Wilkinson's book of the same title. Realizing the relationship between networking and success, Jabez calls on God to enlarge his territory: "Oh that You would bless me indeed and enlarge my territory. That your hand would be with me. And that you would keep me from evil that I may not cause pain."

We, like Jabez, envision the enlargement of our territories through the increase of our professional opportunities, business and social contacts, as well as the establishment of a viable support system. Our blessing, however, is not merely what we receive from others in such an ever-expanding community, but what we give of ourselves. The more we give, the more we ultimately get back.

On Feb. 18, 2004, the Association of the Bar of the City of New York held a panel, organized by Derryl Zimmerman and Arlene Chase, members of the City Bar's Committee on Law Student Perspectives and moderated by me, called "The Art of Schmoozing." The panel included Yvette Chang, a corporate attorney at St. John & Wayne; Ernesto Marrero, special counsel for New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation; Eileen Millett, general counsel for the Interstate Environmental Commission; Terrie Williams, founder of the Terrie



Williams Agency, one of the country's most successful public relations and communications firms; and Stephen Younger, a member of Patterson, Belknap, Webb & Tyler.

The panelists had a wide range of professional experiences in common and keen insight into how to enlarge their territories. Our mantra was that networking is a process that requires a long-term commitment. Enlarging one's territory does not happen overnight but over years.

What comes to mind for many who hear the word "schmooze" is a cocktail party where "small talk" is exchanged and business cards are passed with some detachment. Schmooze is a Yiddish word, taken from the word

"shmuesn", which means to chat or talk informally. Those of us who feel ill-equipped to "work a party" conclude that we are poor networkers simply because we are not schmoozers. But the panelists all agreed that networking is much more than just talk.

The best that you can give to any relationship is your best self; and the best relationship that you can form is a friendship. Networking is about making friends, and friendships develop over time. It is an ongoing process that starts right where you are.

Start Where You Are

Someone once told me that if I wanted to network, the best place to start was right where I was at the time: I was in

law school. Start by looking around your classroom, he said: "Those are the people who may ultimately make a difference in your life." Start by being credible, responsible and reliable with your law school classmates because that is where your reputation begins.

As a result, I got three legal jobs because three different people in law school suggested that their employers hire me: one was in the public service sector, one was in the public interest sector, and one was at a law firm.

Gifts and Talents

An audience participant at the City Bar panel raised the question, "What does a law student have to offer?"

You bring your gifts and talents to the table, which hopefully include your common sense (something that lawyers call good judgment), your respect, your courtesy, your kindness, your discipline, your reliability, dependability and willingness to work hard.

Begin by asking yourself about your strengths and what you can offer to the collective that will begin to take shape in your life. Ask yourself why you went to law school in the first place; what you desired to contribute to society, to the legal profession, to the community in which you live and work. There are opportunities right in your midst. Selectively tap them to find ways to give of yourself.

The starting place for expanding your territory also begins with an hon-

est assessment of who you are and what kind of attitude you have developed about your willingness and ability to contribute your best self. You are the most important thing that you bring to any networking situation.

Unfortunately, so many law students forget the gifts and talents that brought them to law school in the first place and are so willing to settle into the thankless role of a drone, without any spark or life or creativity. No law professor, law school grade, job opportunity, or employer can negate the wonderful person that you were before you arrived. Nothing has changed. You are the point of departure.

A memorable example of this was shared by panelist Eileen Millett. She mentioned that when she was at a tribute, which happened to be a predominantly male gathering, she observed the guest of honor—a prominent female jurist—looking extremely uncomfortable. Eileen had the wisdom and charm to take the jurist under her wing and introduce her to every one at the gathering.

As a result, she and the judge bonded in a meaningful way such that they developed a long-term relationship. But note that Eileen sought to give of herself first—not to get anything in return. Her sincerity and compassion for another were what ultimately won her a valuable connection—not because she was schmoozing to get something. The latter is often transparent and a complete turn-off.

Be Confident

A legal recruiter once told me that the best thing that one can do at an interview is to be “confident.” If you are not confident in yourself, then your audience members will question why they should be confident in you.

An attitude of confidence requires clarity about what you want to succeed in doing. No one can develop this for you. Most people are eager to help people who are helping themselves.

In order to seek and receive guidance and resources from others, you will have to know what you want to accomplish. Granted, you may not know the specifics, and even if you believe you know exactly what you want to do—that might change. Nevertheless, confidence is the assurance of knowing that you have something special to offer to any relationship—business or social. Part and parcel of confidence is the faith that the perfect, divine job for you, uniquely suited to your gifts and talents, is awaiting you. You must move confidently in the direction of your dreams.

Do Not Limit Yourself

If you start from the premise that you must be a giver in your relationship to the network that you wish to create, the first person that you must give to is yourself. Giving to yourself means that you must allow yourself the full extent of your hopes and dreams and aspirations. This means that in the full context of what you want to realize or manifest in your life, do not limit yourself.

Do not be shy about seeking what you want out of life in general and your legal career in particular. This means that you cannot dwell on the appearance of lack in the marketplace to determine what you want to accomplish—otherwise you will lose before you get started.

In law school, students often help nurture negativity. For example, I once witnessed the viewpoint, shared by many law students of color—regardless of their accomplishments—that firms were not receptive to hiring students of color. Perhaps that perspective had some validity, but if you enter the job environment with limiting thoughts on your ability to achieve, you lose before you even get started.

Panelist Ernesto Marrero said that he had not been a top student, but determined networking had helped him give shape to his dreams regardless of what could be perceived as a handicap. If he had begun the networking process with a feeling of resignation due to his grades or any other factor, he would have been defeated before he even began the race. By moving triumphantly toward his goals, assured that he could attain them, he has enjoyed a successful law practice.

Treat Others With Respect

Whatever you give will come back. Mentor others; help others. And you will be rewarded.

One of the greatest things that you can give, other than encouragement, is respect, which merely requires treating everyone with courtesy, patience and sensitivity. Terrie Williams emphasized that no one is “unimportant” in the scheme of things—not the secretary or the receptionist or the mail clerk.

You never know who is going to make a difference in your life. This means adversaries too. You have to be a firm advocate within the bounds of the law, but yelling or disrespecting your adversary is never warranted, even if that person is doing the same.

I know a litigator who has cultivated several clients who were once adversaries. Moreover, you never know when you may need an adversary to speak on your behalf; many political appoint-

ments require that adversaries be listed as references.

Forgive and Release

Related to this principle is that of forgiveness and release. You cannot be effective if you are hanging on to grudges and resentment against anyone—your adversaries, colleagues, friends, associates, whomever. Release the past, no matter what it may hold and move forward.

If you are up for any political appointment, the FBI will interview a number of people whom you cannot even imagine as a law student. So try not to burn any bridges that may get in the way of your successful progression on your career path.

Be a Great Communicator

Being a great communicator does not require you to be gregarious or outgoing; it requires you to be your best self (even if that self is reserved) and to stay in contact.

All of the panelists agreed that the best networkers are masters of the common sense of courtesies, respect, thoughtfulness and kindness. Everyone agreed that the most important person to be is simply yourself. The best way to keep the communication lines open is to open them in the manner most comfortable for you.

One of my friends, who has been successful in the firm environment, the public service environment and the corporate environment, sent me a letter that I will never forget. At the time, he was commissioner of a government agency and I looked up to him. But he wrote me saying that he was glad to be my friend and would always treasure our relationship.

He has a friend for life and his circle of friends treasures their relationship with him. His sincere note was far more important than his outgoing personality.

Terrie Williams provided a number of ways to keep the lines of communication open, such as:

- Be visible by attending professional seminars, luncheons, receptions and dinners, and do not be afraid to attend alone.
- Look people in the eye; be mindful; have a firm handshake.
- Develop a knack for remembering names.
- Be an active listener.
- Create a “small talk” notebook for questions.
- Be sensitive to body language.
- Know your profession by reading relevant periodicals.
- Pass articles along with a note.
- Update your contact file.

- Donate your services.

Panelist Steve Younger stated that he includes a description on the business cards he collects so that he remembers something about the people who gave them to him. Panelist Yvette Chang added that law students should create and hand out their own business cards.

Terrie Williams also supported doing something unique and unusual. For example, she sends a unique, humorous, uplifting etiquette message to those who are grieving. To those who do not return her calls, she has some plastic skeletons that she may send to reflect how long she has been waiting.

Give Thanks

Always be grateful, and in so being, give thanks. Thank-you cards, e-mail and calls are important. Give thanks—not merely because the person has done something for you but simply because they are important to you.

The best thing to do is to make a call when someone has spent time with you, taken you out to lunch, written a letter on your behalf, or done something else for you. It is important to express your gratitude promptly.

Next, follow up with a written thank-you note, not an e-mail (although you can e-mail as well). Terrie Williams' book entitled *The Personal Touch* has all kinds of wonderful suggestions about how to give thanks.

The best practice is to keep thank-you cards, birthday cards, sympathy cards, and get well cards in your office and at home for easy access. Sometimes I just send five to 10 thank-you e-mail messages to those who have been helpful to me along the path. It's good to do that when you do not need something.

I also send flowers periodically to those women attorneys whom I wish to cultivate as mentors. I actually got this idea from my own mentees, now my friends, who have showered me with roses from time to time.

Friendship is really what networking is all about. The best way to make a friend is to be one. Keep promises. Return calls. Participate in events. Help others.

When you give your best, people want to rely on you. And the word of your goodwill spreads. Pretty soon, you will find that you have been blessed with an enlarged territory of friends, mentors, mentees, business associates and acquaintances, as well as a prosperous and successful legal career.

Cecilia B. Loving, an attorney with Patterson, Belknap, Webb & Tyler, began her career as associate appellate counsel for the Legal Aid Society's Criminal Appeals Bureau.