

# PUTTING THE SOCIAL BACK INTO SOCIAL NETWORKING

By Terrie S. Wheeler, MBC

**S**ummer is finally here – from backyard barbeques to outdoor work events, from firm open houses to boat cruises, the doors are now open to myriad warm-weather social events, fundraisers, weddings, and Bat Mitzvas. Like bears coming out of hibernation, your friends, colleagues and co-workers have amped up their social lives for the summer. It's time that you join in the fun! Summer, by its warm and balmy nature, encourages social interaction of all kinds. One employment lawyer I know got a new client at a baby shower. So, how can you capitalize on the events you will attend this summer?

**SAY YES!** By nature, lawyers tend to be more introverted than extroverted. Be aware of your personality preferences and, if need be, push yourself out of your comfort zone. You won't meet new people if you don't say yes to invitations. Say yes to that bar association mixer, to the open house your colleague is hosting. There is no possibility of meeting new contacts holed up in your office working. Just say yes!

**ASK GREAT QUESTIONS.** Most people like talking about themselves, including lawyers! Remember that when you ask questions of others, you are in control of the conversation. Not only are you the boss of the conversation, you are showing people you genuinely care about them and their lives. Before the event, come up with a mental list of questions to ask people (more than just, "So what do you do?").

**BROADEN YOUR HORIZONS.** If you attend an event with members of your firm, do not spend the entire event talking only to those you know, huddled over drinks at a tall table in the corner discussing firm business. Reach out to others. Introduce yourself. Set a goal of meeting three new people at each event you attend.

**BE THE CONNECTOR.** Remember many people at these events arrive and wish they could leave. "So here I am. I don't

know a soul. My fight or flight is telling me to flee now before I do see someone I know!" If you can relate, hang in there. If you see someone standing alone and looking as uncomfortable as you feel, be the one to introduce yourself. When you see someone you know, introduce your new friend to that person. Be "that person" who tries to connect people with others.

**IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT BUSINESS.** People bond with one another not about the case they're working on or the deal they just closed. They bond about what matters to them in their life – their families, hobbies, sports, artistic endeavors. You bond with people more over what they do when they're *not* working. If you ask great questions, you will walk down a conversational path about what really makes that person tick. Then, the conversation will become quite effortless.

**SEARCHING FOR COMMONALITY.** Another reason to ask a lot of questions is to find something you have in common with the person you are talking to. Commonality is the big social equalizer. It's highly likely because you're at the same event, you already share something in common.

**DO A LITTLE PRE-EVENT PLANNING.** Often, you may know who will be attending the event. Take some time before you leave, to look at a few LinkedIn profiles of people you will likely see there. Get up to speed on what they're posting, and other notable accomplishments they have.

**COME EARLY – STAY LATE.** Many busy lawyers don't mind being late to events. "At least I'm here," they say. If you miss the first 30-45 minutes of networking before the event, you've likely missed *the* most important part of the program – the part that will help you meet new contacts. Sometime around 8 p.m. you realize you're tired. You compliment yourself for making an appearance and sneak out a few minutes early. You can see how

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this behavior flies in the face of business networking. Try not to be that person.

**CONNECT AND ENGAGE.** When you meet people at social events, don't forget about them! When you're back in your office, or over the weekend, go to LinkedIn and connect with them. Let them know how much you enjoyed meeting them at <name the event.> Keep them on your radar and reach out to them from time-to-time on social media.

**LET YOUR PERSONALITY COME THROUGH.** After the event, your main thread back to the new contacts you've met is likely through social media. I recently facilitated a panel of successful lawyers who were discussing the best ways in which to post on social media. It became clear that volume not only may hurt you, but that your posts need to be extremely personal and reflect topics that are genuinely meaningful to you. Rather than having someone post FOR you every day, commit to personally posting for yourself two to three days per week.

**SAY WHAT YOU'LL DO AND DO WHAT YOU SAY.** Yes, I am borrowing from the timeless philosopher, Dr. Seuss. You know how uncomfortable it is when someone offers to do something for you and they never follow through? What if they changed their mind? I don't want to bug them. How to I get them to do what they said they will do? Don't put your contacts in this predicament. Make a note to yourself. Let Siri remind you. Be the person who follows up on her promises!

With the flowers blooming and outdoor events popping up everywhere, now is the time to get out and engage with people – real people with real interests! Use your advocacy skills to ask people questions about themselves and their lives. You will then be on the road to improving both your networking skills, but your ability to genuinely relate to and build relationships with people.



**TERRIE S. WHEELER, MBC, IS THE FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT OF PROFESSIONAL SERVICES MARKETING LLC. FOR NEARLY 30 YEARS, TERRIE HAS WORKED WITH INDIVIDUAL LAWYERS TO HELP THEM HONE THEIR PERSONAL NETWORKING AND RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING SKILLS. NEED HELP OR MOTIVATION? YOU CAN REACH TERRIE AT [TERRIE@PSM-MARKETING.COM](mailto:TERRIE@PSM-MARKETING.COM) OR (320) 358-1000.**

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