

Lawyer updates networking style

By L.M. SIXEL

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In this tough economic environment, networking is more important for lawyers than ever.

So says Ari Kaplan, a former big-firm lawyer who now works as a coach, lecturer, author and occasional ghostwriter for legal clients.

But self-promotion today isn't just collecting business

cards or showing up and shaking hands at monthly legal seminars, says Kaplan, author of *The Opportunity Maker: Strategies for Inspiring Your Legal Career Through Creative Networking and Business Development*.

In a recent speech at the University of Houston Law Center, Kaplan talked to law students and alumni about the importance of setting up

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A BALANCE IN SELF-PROMOTION: Ari Kaplan wrote a book about building a career in law.

KAPLAN: Staying in touch, not networking

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Google alerts, writing a blog and finding ways to meet the people who could potentially help your career.

After his talk he spoke with the Chronicle about the do's and don'ts of networking.

Q: Do lawyers have an easier time networking? Or is it harder?

A: Harder. Because people who seek to be lawyers tend to be more risk-averse than other professionals.

The practice has mistakenly followed certain traditions of marketing and business development. These traditions are now being replaced with more creative and updated notions of creating opportunity such as using technology and marketing more frequently and finding ways to stand out.

Q: What's an especially effective networking technique?

A: Making a list of the specific people you want to meet and then finding a way to interview them.

Q: How about those who aren't writers? How can they use that networking tool to their advantage?

A: Web-based tools give you a forum to post or share information. Many people use it to distribute information about themselves — you look at Twitter and it says, "I'm eating lunch now." But you could interview someone and share that recording with your network and your network's network, which is the new model of modern relationships — going beyond a single network.

Q: How do you make it so it doesn't sound contrived?

A: If you are genuinely interested in meeting someone and using it to serve as a resource rather than for your own interest, it won't appear contrived.

In a down market, everyone at every level is interested in raising his/her profile. So take advantage of the opportunity to meet people you might not otherwise have a chance to meet.

Q: Why are so many people bad at networking?

A: It's because they tend to focus on themselves, which makes people uncomfortable. When someone focuses on the other person, there's no pressure. There's no insecurity. And you find something interesting about that other person, which is the foundation for a connection.

Q: Why don't some people follow through when they meet someone they'd like to know better?

A: Because they don't know how and they don't want to appear as if they're just networking on a schedule. I suggest that people listen for time-sensitive clues so they can follow up with people they meet. If you just started a

new job, in six months I'll ask how it's going. It shows you are interested.

Also add people to a Google alert. It's a great, great tool. What it will do is tell you every time someone appears online. When they're quoted — maybe they just got promoted, maybe they just won a case—then you can send an e-mail, "congratulations on your case." Each of those alerts is a potential opportunity.

Q: What's the difference between relationship building and networking?

A: The difference is sincerity. Networking has a connotation that conveys the image of collecting business cards. Piles and piles of cards.

Relationship-building humanizes the art of meeting and finding community with other people. Once you identify those common interests it's no longer networking. It's really just staying in touch.

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