

NETWORKING TIPS FROM DEAN RAY

April 2014

To: Law Students attending bench and bar events

I'm writing to pass along a few simple tips for networking and making a good impression. You want to use this opportunity to meet lawyers and learn more about the practice of law

1. Set a goal of meeting and getting to know two or three people at the event. This is manageable and having this goal will make the event seem less overwhelming.
2. A professional and conservative appearance (there are many sales that will let you buy a professional looking outfit or suit for about 40% of regular price if you watch for them)
3. Name tag on the right side so that when I shake your hand, I'm looking directly at it
4. If you fill out your own name tag, print clearly your name and below it, write "St Thomas Law" Many of us have visual memories and you want us to focus on your name. Listing your law school there is a good conversation starter and avoids the "What firm are you with" that your professional appearance would solicit.
5. Put your cold wet drink in your left hand so that when you shake my hand, yours will not be cold and wet
6. Start conversations with strangers – the line at the bar is a good place because they will have broken away from their law firm colleagues. At other times, you will see someone standing alone, perhaps scanning the room as you are. Don't hesitate to introduce yourself – they might be feeling as lost as you.
7. Do not cluster with a group of your friends – Circulate alone or with one friend if that makes you more comfortable (and then you can introduce each other to people you've met individually) but circulating in groups makes you less accessible.
8. Show a sincere interest – ask follow-up questions that encourage positive answers – Once they tell you they're in real estate law, you can ask how they chose their field, or what they find most rewarding, etc. Have a conversation. To do this, introduce yourself and mention that you are a ___ year student at St Thomas Law. They will respond with their name and often their office. You can then ask what field they practice in and, when they tell you, you can ask "Do you recommend that field for a new attorney?" In the following conversation you can find out what they like about it – when people get to talk about their enthusiasms, they feel good (and feel good about the person who made this happen.)
9. If you are interested in knowing more, there might be a chance to say "I'd really enjoy learning more about your practice – may I contact you to schedule a convenient time to visit your office? If they are positive, they will give you a card. If not, you've lost nothing. Many conversations, however, will not provide the magic moment to ask that before they are called away. Have a pen and notepad with you. Before you forget, jot down their name and what you talked about. That way you can email the next day to mention that you enjoyed your conversation about _____ (to help them remember you) and wondering if you could schedule a time to come to

the office to learn more about that area of practice. Again, as long as you are polite and friendly, this will sometimes work. If they are too busy, you've still learned more about the practice from them and you've lost nothing.

10. Do not destroy the good impression by failing to listen or pay attention. For example, do not look over their shoulder to see who else is there (or sneak a look at your phone.) We like people who pay attention to us.
11. Do not overstay your welcome – when you get to the head of the drink line or if you are in another location and you can tell, from body language or lulls in conversation, that it would be polite to move on, close the conversation with efficient enthusiasm. “ I don't want to monopolize all your time but I really enjoyed meeting you and appreciate your advice. “ Close with a smile and a firm handshake to leave a lasting good impression. Of course, if they've agreed to meet at another time, you'd indicate you look forward to learning more.
12. The food and drink will be good. That is not, however, the best thing about the reception so do not spend so much time at the buffet table that you miss opportunities to meet people
13. At some lunches and dinners, there are assigned tables where you sit with your group. When you are at an event where this is not the case, avoid the temptation to choose a table where you know the people. If there is an empty chair among strangers, you can say “May I join your table?” Every once in a while they have promised the chair to someone else but usually they will welcome you – you can introduce yourself to others at the table and become part of conversation. Although I've been a labor and employment lawyer, I've learned a lot about admiralty, estate planning, and other practice areas just by sitting with a group of strangers, some of whom then become friends.
14. First impressions are important – so are lasting impressions so be sure to thank the people at your table for taking time with you, sharing their table, etc. It will leave them with a good impression and make it easier for you to follow up.

By the way, people tend to like positive people. You will be better liked if you share positive impressions about your experiences, including your law school experience. You might share with them the fact that our law students provided over 23,000 hours of volunteer public service last year through our Pro Bono Leadership program, if you end up discussing volunteer work.

If this raises any questions, feel free to contact me at dray@stu.edu.

Enjoy the experience. Make new friends.

Douglas E. Ray, Dean and Professor of Law
St. Thomas University School of Law
16401 NW 37th Avenue
Miami Gardens, Florida 33054
Phone: 305-474-2448
E-Mail: dray@stu.edu