

NSW SUPPORT STAFF COMMITTEE

NETWORKING & MARKETING MASTERCLASS



PREPARED AND PRESENTED BY

GEMMA BERKHOUT
PERSONAL ASSISTANT / PARALEGAL
CHAIR - NSW SUPPORT STAFF COMMITTEE

ABOUT NETWORKING & MARKETING



For lawyers, networking and marketing forms a big part of their role – it is generally how they go about retaining clients. Unlike lawyers, legal support staff traditionally have not had any necessity within their role to undertake networking and marketing activities.

Lawyers also have more access to events in which they can undertake networking and marketing activities – client lunches, CLE seminars, conferences and networking drinks. These kinds of events have not previously been available for support staff on a regular basis.

At the Support Staff Committee, we believe that legal support staff should have access to these networking and marketing opportunities in the same way that lawyers do. We have been working on a number of events and educational seminars for this exact reason.

THE BENEFITS OF NETWORKING & MARKETING

There are many benefits to support staff undertaking networking and marketing activities, including:

- Networking with others in the support staff community provides a place to share knowledge, best practices and 'war stories' with other support staff and legal professionals. Having a network of people working in similar environments gives you a place to go to for career advice and support from other support staff.
 - Networking with others also gives you access to more job opportunities. You may be notified of job vacancies prior to positions being advertised, approached (or 'poached') for positions, or given preference during an interview process because you know someone at the firm who can put in a good word about your experience, skills and attitude to work.
-

-
- Similarly, marketing yourself effectively online and within the legal community may give you an advantage when applying for positions. Having effective marketing skills can also assist you during interviews, in which you are essentially selling yourself to a prospective employer.
 - You will also have access to people, through networking, who can assist you in your role in one way or another. Some examples might include cross-referrals such as in areas of law in which your respective offices do not practice or being able to call in favours with people in your network including for something to be done more efficiently than it would have otherwise been done.

WHAT IS MARKETING?

When you consider marketing in the legal profession, you would typically think about the materials that a firm and its solicitors use to seek out and engage clients. The marketing relationship is essentially between the firm and its potential clients – where the firm sells, or markets, their services to their audience, the general public, who are their prospective clients.

For support staff, marketing might look a little different. Whilst we may be involved in the firm-client marketing relationship to some degree, typically the service that we are trying to sell is ourselves and our 'market audience' will be other legal professionals including support staff, solicitors and recruitment staff such as HR or specialist recruiters.

"Marketing refers to activities undertaken by a company to promote the buying or selling of a product or service. Marketing includes advertising, selling and delivering products to consumers or other businesses" - Investopedia



TIPS FOR MARKETING

CREATE A PERSONAL BRAND

Consider the whole package. Think about how you present to your market audience such as a potential employer or networking connection. This would include how you present on social media (specifically LinkedIn) as well as at networking functions.

This should be consistent not only across all marketing and networking that you undertake but also in your everyday work as well. For example, if you want to be known as being professional, you should remain courteous in all of your dealings with your colleagues and other legal professionals.

THINK ABOUT YOUR UNIQUE SELLING POINT

What is it that makes you different and what are the key skills and qualities that set you apart from others? Some examples may include:

- Involvement in committees and organisations.
- Skills in areas outside of law that you may positively bring into your role, such as strong IT skills, leadership skills, events management etc.
- Qualifications (paralegal qualifications, business management etc).

When presenting yourself to others (whether that be in your resume, online or in person at networking events and job interviews), you should emphasise these unique selling points that make you different to others.

HAVE AN ONLINE PRESENCE

Having an online presence is extremely important for connecting with potential employers and other support staff.

Think about what message you are sending through your online presence - remember your personal brand as discussed earlier.

A great way to connect with potential employers and other legal professionals is to engage with them on LinkedIn. This may involve:

- Joining groups specifically for support staff (such as EA PA Australia & NZ, Secretarial Ladies, Australia's Office Angels) or for your area of law.
- Commenting on posts by others.
- Sharing updates about your area of law including any update to Court procedures. Not only is this helpful to other support staff in your network, but this also shows people (including potential employers and other support staff) that you are knowledgeable and informed in these areas.
- Writing articles about your area of law or other aspects of being a legal support professional.

Don't forget about your non-professional social media use on websites such as Facebook and Instagram. Consider and be careful about what information you upload and make 'public' on your personal accounts. For example - in 2015, one woman got fired before she had even started her job after posting to Facebook "I start my new job today, I really hate being around a lot of kids." She was a daycare worker. Needless to say, this is not good marketing.

NETWORKING



I am the first to admit that networking can be hard work. I am quite shy and can be socially awkward when first meeting people. The thought of going out to a networking event with all of these brand new faces and introducing myself to strangers can be quite terrifying! Firstly, you should know that there are many different ways to network with others. These may include:

INTERNAL NETWORKING, WITHIN YOUR OWN FIRM

The easiest way to start networking is within your own firm. You already have a great icebreaker because you work together, and there are so many opportunities to get to know your co-workers, including:

- In the kitchen / at the water cooler - say hi to people in the kitchen or ask them how their weekend was.
- Attend Friday drinks, end of year celebrations and other firm-organised social events.
- Put out candy and snacks, or host a pot luck morning tea. The easiest way to make friends is to share some delicious food with them!
- Invite other support staff and newcomers out of the office for coffee or lunch.

Avoid exchanging those awkward smiles and introduce yourself!

EXTERNAL NETWORKING

There are many ways in which you can network with other legal professionals outside of your office, including:

- Attending educational seminars and CPD events;
- Attending networking functions;
- Reaching out to people via social media platforms including LinkedIn;
- Meeting people one-on-one for coffee catch-ups or lunches;
- Joining professional groups and other organisations; and
- Meeting other professionals through your existing connections.

Find something that you are comfortable with doing, especially as you first start out at networking. If you are quite introverted for example, you may prefer to reach out to people online or to organise one-on-one meetings as opposed to attending large scale networking events.

TIPS FOR NETWORKING

QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

You should aim to make one or two valuable connections during each event, rather than trying to get to know everyone in the room. This takes a lot of pressure off of trying to meet a lot of people and remembering everyone's names.

BRING A FRIEND

If you are shy or reserved, bring along a support person from your office. It is often hard to boast about your own successes, so it is always helpful to have a friend with you who might be able to assist in talking you up. However, try not to fall into the trap of only spending time with the people that you came to the event with.

MAKE A PLAN

If possible, get an idea of who might be in attendance at the event so you can target anyone you might have been trying to connect with previously. Think about any existing relationships that you might want to strengthen. If you do know who is attending, do some research beforehand and see if there are any common areas of interest that you may be able to connect over.

BE AUTHENTIC & BE YOURSELF

Avoid going in with an agenda or with the specific objective of trying to sell yourself or your services as this can be quite transparent and off-putting to others in attendance. Once you start developing connections based on your authentic self, the benefits of these connections should occur naturally.

USE GOOD COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Practice active listening and good communication skills - ask questions and let the other person speak. A potential connection isn't likely to engage with you regularly if the conversation is always one-sided.

HAVE FUN, BUT NOT TOO MUCH FUN

It's okay to have fun, but always remain professional, especially when there is alcohol involved. This may seem self-explanatory, but sometimes people do not follow these rules and it can have an incredibly negative impact not only on your networking but also on your professional reputation.

DON'T GOSSIP

Even if you feel like you are in a safe space, you should always avoid gossiping or venting about a firm or person with someone you have only recently met. At a networking event, you never know who the person you are talking to is connected with and you could be badmouthing someone that they like! Furthermore, when people are considering who they would like to retain in their own firm, they will be unlikely to turn to someone who frequently gossips and vents about others. If other people are instigating gossip, you should try to shut this down and avoid participating.

NETWORKING, POST-EVENT

MAINTAINING CONTACT POST-EVENT

To properly utilise any connections you make during the course of a networking event, it is important to follow up with them post-event to properly develop the relationship and maintain contact. If you do not do this, you risk losing this connection.

If you do not already have them as a connection on LinkedIn, add them.

You should also get in touch with any potential connections after an event to acknowledge meeting them and to organise a follow-up meeting one-on-one such as a coffee or lunch.

A simple but effective message could be sent, along the lines of the following:

"Hi,

It was great to meet you last night at (name of event). I was really interested in what you were saying about (topic) and it would be great to hear more about it! Are you free for a coffee in the next two weeks to chat?"

It might also be helpful for you to keep a record of all of your professional contacts in one place and separately from your personal contacts. If you use Outlook at work, you could record them in the Contacts folder.

ENRICHING YOUR NETWORKING RELATIONSHIPS

A successful networking relationship is one where each contact provides some benefit to the other. This can occur in many ways, including:

- Where one contact acts as a mentor, assisting with the other's career progression;
- Connecting with other contacts who could assist in your role;
- Referring clients; and
- The mutual provision of advice and sharing of knowledge.

To enrich your professional relationships with networking connections, you should think about how you can help that person. In turn, they will be more likely to return the favour, ensuring that both parties receive mutual benefit from the networking relationship.

BUSINESS CARDS



Business cards form an important part of the networking and marketing process. Especially in larger scale networking activities, business cards are a simple way for new connections to exchange information about each other in order to keep in contact after the event.

Unfortunately, most legal support professionals are not provided with business cards by their firm. This is especially the case as support staff have not previously had access to networking events on a regular basis.

This gave us the idea to give support staff the opportunity during this event to design their own business cards using the design program Canva.

When creating your business cards, you should keep a few things in mind:

- You should choose a unique but simple and professional design. Whilst you want your business card to stand out, you do not want to have something that is too crazy - Arial or Times New Roman fonts are great, Curlz MT or Chiller are not.
 - Ensure contact details are correct, and update them when required.
 - Include only relevant information - your LinkedIn profile might be suitable, your Instagram profile not so much.
 - Include your position description but not which firm you are working at (in case this changes).
-

SPEED NETWORKING

For the speed networking portion of this event, we have provided the below guided questions to assist you in breaking the ice with other support staff. These topics of questions are purposefully designed for you to get the most out of your speed networking experience. This is also a great guide to use for any future networking events.



THE BASICS

Start with your name, employer, position and area of law - easy!

CHOOSE ONE WORK-RELATED QUESTION

These questions are designed for you to learn a little more about the other person and where they work. They are regular "small-talk" style questions about the person's career and their role.

1. How big is your firm?
 2. Does the firm have any other practice areas?
 3. How many people do you support?
 4. What is the culture like at your firm?
 5. How long have you been in this role?
 6. How did you get into this area of law?
 7. What is it like working in this area of law?
 8. Have you undertaken any additional training in your role?
-

CHOOSE ONE ADVICE RELATED QUESTION

One of the great benefits of networking with others is sharing knowledge or advice. These questions aim to open up a more in-depth dialogue and go beyond general small talk.

1. Have you ever worked with a difficult personality? How did you manage that?
2. Do you maintain a good work/life balance? Do you have any tips?
3. Is there any extra training you can recommend for someone in my position?
4. What would be your number one interviewing tip?
5. Which IT feature or trick do you think is most helpful in your job?

CHOOSE ONE RANDOM QUESTION NOT RELATED TO WORK

You may find that you have more in common with other legal support professionals than just your job! Finding common hobbies, likes and dislikes can really assist in helping you bond with new connections and learn more about them.

1. What is your happy place?
 2. What song would you use as the theme song if your life was a movie?
 3. If you could be in any movie or TV show, which one would it be?
 4. If you could eliminate one thing from your daily routine, what would it be and why?
 5. You have to wear a t-shirt with one word on it for a whole year. Which word do you choose?
 6. Would you rather - always say everything on your mind or never speak again?
 7. What is your pet hate?
-

ABOUT THE NSW SUPPORT STAFF COMMITTEE

THE AWESOME PEOPLE BEHIND THIS MASTERCLASS

The NSW Support Staff Committee is made up of 15 Committee Members representing various areas of law, administrative positions and levels of experience. The role of the Committee is to provide legal support professionals with:

- A platform for networking and socialising with support staff colleagues;
- Access to mentors, educational seminars and other educational resources to improve the knowledge and skills of support staff within the legal profession; and
- A community in which they can share ideas and knowledge, raise concerns and discuss issues relevant to them in a confidential setting.

The Committee are currently working on a number of exciting events and resources, such as:

- An educational seminar on how to work with different types of lawyer personalities;
- Best Practice Guides on topics relevant to support staff, including briefing counsel, ethics and file management.
- A mentor program.

All Committee resources, events and seminars are open to any person working in a legal support role. If you wish to be included in the Committee's mailing list to receive the Committee's resources and notification of Committee events, please contact our Committee Chair, Gemma, on gberkhout@landers.com.au, or follow us on any of our social media pages:

Linkedin: www.linkedin.com/company/nsw-support-staff-committee

Instagram: www.instagram.com/nswsupportstaff

Facebook: www.facebook.com/nswsupportstaff

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GEMMA BERKHOUT, PERSONAL ASSISTANT & PARALEGAL CHAIR OF THE NSW SUPPORT STAFF COMMITTEE

Gemma has been a personal assistant, practicing in family law, for 10 years. In 2015, she completed an Associate Degree of Law (Paralegal Studies).

In 2017, Gemma started a networking group for family law support staff and in 2018 worked with the Law Society of NSW to establish the NSW Support Staff Committee, of which she is the Committee Chair.

Gemma has recently been announced as a finalist in the Lawyers Weekly Australian Law Awards, Legal Support Professional of the Year category.

THANKS!

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING OUR NETWORKING AND MARKETING MASTERCLASS & SPEED NETWORKING EVENT!
