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# The Introvert Lawyer's Guide to Networking

By Claire E. Parsons

A few years ago, a meme that I found hilarious circulated the internet. It read “Introverts of the world unite! Separately. In your own homes.” That meme is both true and not true, and maybe that’s why it’s funny. The meme is true because introverts tend not to like large group activities, but it’s also not true because it doesn’t mean they can’t do the things that we tend to categorize as activities for extroverts. I’m a trial lawyer, I love public speaking, and I am an introvert. Networking is a part of professional life for most lawyers, even introverts like me. Over the years, I’ve picked up some strategies that have allowed me to do the networking I have to do to advance my practice without draining myself or causing too much suffering. Here they are.

**Follow Your Passion**

In *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking*, Susan Cain identifies Eleanor Roosevelt as an introvert. Yes, the indomitable and expectation-defying first lady is classified as someone who preferred quiet life and enjoyed solitude or small groups. How did Roosevelt manage to do the work she had to do as first lady? Cain posits that she followed her passion. In other words, Roosevelt was motivated to impact the world positively and drew courage and inspiration from that.

There’s a good lesson from the former first lady that we can all use. Networking for lawyers doesn’t have to follow any set path. To do it well, you really just need to get out of your office and

engage with your community. Find a cause that matters to you or even something you just find fun and go for it. When you really believe in a cause or enjoy an activity, you will likely find it much easier to handle large group activities or even public speaking, even as an introvert.

**Know the Power of One**

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Networking often gets conflated with attending networking events, like cocktail receptions, but that is not the only way to do it. Introverts are experts at the inner life, so we may be better at finding ways to connect deeply with people in a way that others will remember for a long time.

do it. Introverts are experts at the inner life, so we may be better at finding ways to connect deeply with people in a way that others will remember for a long time. Capitalize on this skill! In particular, don’t underestimate the value of one-on-one or small group lunch dates. Don’t forget that your book club with a few friends is still networking. The goal of networking is to expand your social circle and build your

reputation with new people. If you keep at it, consistently and over time, you will expand your reach substantially, even if you meet only a few new people at a time.

In fact, you don’t even have to leave your office to expand and tend to your network. One of my favorite things to do is to write notes to friends and contacts. This may seem small, but it can have huge benefits. In *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell discussed the impressive social network that one well-known connector developed, in part, by sending birthday cards to all of the loose contacts he developed in his daily life.

In other words, networking doesn’t have to be big and flashy. If it is consistently and authentically done, small acts over time can help even the quietest of introverts develop an impressive and loyal social network.

**Grin and Bear It**

As we all know, nothing worthwhile ever comes easy. Thus, at a certain point, most introverted lawyers are going to have to learn to deal with larger social events at least part of the time. If you treat yourself with compassion and keep trying, this will eventually get easier.

Early in my practice, I hated going to networking events because it made my feeling of being a kid play-acting at being a lawyer go into overdrive. I didn’t know anyone. I didn’t know what to say. And it just felt awkward and awful. My solution: I joined the happy hour committee with my local chamber of commerce and eventually chaired it. As a committee member, it was my job not



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only to attend but also to welcome new attendees. I found that, because it was my job, it was a lot easier to approach new people and start conversations. With practice and over time, I built skills and new contacts. After a few months, the conversation was effortless and even fun.

In other words, introversion is a tendency, but it doesn't have to be a destiny. With time and attention, you can build skills and confidence that make large social interactions much less challenging and more fun.

**Remember to Recharge**

I have to return to Susan Cain here because her book is one that all introverts should read, especially because her definition of introversion is the best I've heard. Cain defines introverts as people who generally crave less—not socialization—but stimulation. This often translates as an avoidance of large social activities because those tend to be the circumstances in which introverts may become overstimulated, worn down, or grumpy. In large social gatherings, there is stimulation galore: activity, noise, and the stress of coming up with things to say.

When I went through leadership development programs, I often jokingly called the sessions an “introvert’s nightmare” because we would travel around in groups of 40 or more all day, without any real break, and often in close quarters. I loved the people in these programs, but this was exhausting for me. The thing that helped the most was making a concerted effort to recharge whenever I had the chance. If we got even a short break, I would go meditate or take a quick walk by myself. If we didn't, I brought headphones and took five minutes to meditate or to listen to calming music on the bus. These small breaks helped me rest and recharge so I didn't get overstimulated and could enjoy the rest of the activities. You don't necessarily have to meditate, but if you can find a way to relax (*i.e.*, manage your intake of stimulation) before or after large social activities, it may help you be present for and enjoy the activities more.

Networking is something introvert lawyers can and should do. But

networking for introverts may not look exactly like networking for extroverts. And you know what? That's okay. All lawyers must find a style of practice that works for them, so it makes sense that we

must also find a style of networking that suits our personalities. In sum, and to borrow from another meme, I say to my fellow introvert lawyers, keep calm and network on.



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