

Tools to triumph over our familiar foe: networking

Networking... the word that strikes fear into the heart of most trainees and equally one of the most important skills of a successful lawyer. Find out more in Charlotte's post.

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Many of us will recognise feeling apprehensive when approaching a group of professionals deep in conversation. We often discreetly edge into the outer ring of the circle and, once settled, struggle to get our voices heard, all the while trying to ensure we are not dominating the conversation or interrupting others. Then there is the dilemma of realising that the flow of conversation is slowing down and we are now trapped for longer than we wanted to be! We know that there are other people that we should be networking with but don't know how to politely move on from the current conversation and make the most of the event.

Fortunately, Browne Jacobson recognises how nerve-racking networking can be for junior lawyers and offers training sessions to assist. Knowing my own apprehension when it comes to networking, I jumped at the chance to attend!

Earlier this year an external training provider – PCA Law – delivered the first of a two-part training course to tackle the struggles people encounter when networking. The initial session focussed on “working the room.” The second session (which will be delivered later this year) will deal with how best to follow up on the relationships created at networking events.

The team at PCA Law created a very relaxed atmosphere where everybody felt comfortable to contribute and get involved. To start, anecdotes and past experiences (some good, some horrific) were shared to target the areas that people struggled with the most. The PCA Law team's trained actors then acted out some networking scenarios that we were asked to critique. It was then our opportunity to take centre stage. We took it in turns to roleplay a networking situation that we found difficult and get feedback from our peers.

Browne Jacobson's Learning & Development team also got involved and gave us their valuable insights on how to raise the profile of the firm and cross-sell by listening to clients and their needs, rather than simply delivering a sales pitch. To finish, we reflected on everything that we had learnt and created a list of networking top tips for use at real-life events.

The top tips that I took away from the event were:

- adopt a 'host' mindset - treat everyone as your guest (even if you are not actually hosting the event)
- ask open questions and actively listen to the answers
- ask a variety of questions covering people's personal lives, their role and business
- move with purpose when joining a new group of professionals (rather than hovering around the circle)
- Don't leave anybody on their own. If you are networking with one other person and you want to network with someone else, ask if that person wants to join you
- Be honest when exiting a conversation

The session was very interactive, engaging and – surprisingly - enjoyable. It boosted my confidence and was great for my personal and professional development.

Later that week Browne Jacobson held its annual “New Year New Networks” event, which is a networking event specifically for young professionals or people new to their career. The event gives attendees a fantastic opportunity to network with peers in other industries whilst enjoying food, drinks and entertainment. The timing of the event was great for course attendees, as we were all able to confidently practice our newly-learned networking skills on home turf (i.e. the Browne Jacobson office!).

The second networking training session is scheduled for later this year and I for one cannot wait!

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