Five Tips for Becoming an Opportunity Maker

By Ari L. Kaplan, Esq.

On-campus interviewing is over, and now the real fun begins. Whether the process was successful or not, here is a secret: you have more control over your career destiny than you realize. The key to success in the law is using your time in law school wisely because you will not have a similar chance again. Those who plant the seeds for opportunities that will materialize as soon as next summer and over the span of a lifetime are destined for success.

Write Your Own Offer

Start by writing it all down— in an article, that is. Writing for publication is particularly powerful in the legal world. It shapes your standing in the community, organically helps to expand your network, and inspires your day. Writers tend to meet more interesting people, develop lasting relationships with them, and find continued reasons to interact. They master the fundamental techniques associated with business development by concentrating on a few key points that contribute to their publishing success.

You can connect with almost anyone you want through writing, whether it is the founder of a local business or the head of litigation for a global law firm.

Try these techniques before finals:

- Make a list of the people you want to meet, either in the legal community or beyond.
- Compile story ideas that would connect them (e.g., local business trends, lawyers redirecting their practices in a down economy, etc.).
- Consider profiling or quoting one or more of the people on your list (but interview individuals in person, rather than on the phone, if possible).
- Find a co-author.

Study for the Knowledge, Not the Grades

Developing story ideas and discussing them with practitioners will help you identify areas that you enjoy. Now it’s time to get some experience. If you’re at the top of your class, congratulations — your initial job search will be a little easier — but practical skill tends to level the playing field. Use law school as an opportunity to get that training and acquire some easy credits in the process. Get an internship or some other real-world exposure.

Follow up with everyone you meet. Remember their birthdays and other professional milestones (e.g., if you work for a judge, note the date of his or her first appointment/election and make a point to email or write him or her on that date every year). Doing so will set you apart and make you memorable, which is key both in job hunting and in life.

Take CLE

Supplement your experience with course work in your area of interest. Continuing Legal Education is the single best way to develop familiarity with a particular subject in a short period. Unlike a class, which is populated by your classmates, practitioners at all levels attend CLE courses. In addition, although they are expensive for lawyers, they are frequently free or deeply discounted for law students.

Law school classes are a good start, but to go farther:

- Contact your local bar association.
- Find a CLE course in your area of interest, register, and attend.
- Arrive early and strike up a conversation with your neighbor.
- Remember the conversation and note any relevant dates on which to follow up (if, for example, your neighbor notes that he or she has an important oral argument coming up, note the date and be sure to follow up).

You may not meet a potential employer, but you may set the foundation for a great long-term professional relationship. Those who surround themselves with a genuine network built
on sincerity and mutual value tend to be more successful. Period.

**Get Involved Locally**

Begin creating that network at home. Most municipalities have leadership programs to encourage residents to learn about a particular city by getting involved in the local chamber of commerce. These programs bring individuals from all career levels and disciplines together to learn more about the city in which they live. They study local politics, natural resource management, and education. It’s an ideal way to connect with others who have a mutual interest in improving the community.

**Study the Media**

Journalists are part of that group. One of the easiest ways to generate name recognition and to stand out in today’s stagnant economy is to meet them and study the media. Email or call a local reporter and ask him or her to have coffee. Most are very receptive to this sort of invitation. If you are involved in something interesting, such as the local chamber of commerce, you may even have a story idea.

The key to becoming an opportunity maker is to interact in an honest and genuine way. That will help you in the job search now and position you for client development success in the future. It will also inspire your day and make life a lot of more fun. Take the chance and you might be surprised at the results.

**About the Author**