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# Marketing

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## THE PLACE TO NETWORK

### Transition Networking Strategies for Female Attorneys

#### *Network to Make That Change*

By Christy Burke

"The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation," said Thoreau in *Walden*. Well, many female attorneys are in that same category. The legal industry can be very tough on its participants, and women are no exception.

There is great transition occurring among today's women lawyers. The current law firm situation is dramatically different than it was only a year ago. In the past year, major large firms have laid off associates, and the financial industry, which historically fed many law firms' business pipelines, has been brought to its knees by the auction rate security and subprime mortgage fiascoes.

This upheaval, along with lifestyle factors, has prompted many women to consider making a change in their career lives, and several of them have followed through on finding a better opportunity for themselves. These new careers hold benefits not only for them and their employers and clients, but also for their families in many cases. Some female attorneys are leaving jobs at firms to go solo, or they find jobs as in-house counsel with a corporation or legal industry vendor. Still others are leaving the law world completely to explore completely different alternatives, seeking respite from the grueling lifestyle and competitive environments that characterize many of the big firms.

#### **GOING SOLO**

Many women dream of having their own practice one day — it is a very fetching thought to be your own boss and call your own shots, to take vacation when you want, and choose which clients to work with. However, there is a huge fear factor that prevents many from taking the risk.

Carolyn Elefant has been a successful solo practitioner for the past 15 years. She initially started her own practice when she realized she was not on the "partner track" at the law firm where she worked.

Early on when building her book of business, Elefant attended events for a number of established networking groups, but she found the participants to be patronizing. She changed gears and began to focus on specific niches where she felt she could stand out. "I went to county committee meetings on renewable resources — a topic I was an expert on. I focused on winning small clients instead of large ones — I was a big fish in a small pond. Also, I went to sparsely populated bar events and chose regional or city events as opposed to national ones. Attending those events was a good strategy."

More recently, Elefant has become a blogger, authoring her own MyShingle.com and also blogging for Law.com. She has written a book entitled *Solo by Choice: How to Be the Lawyer You Always Wanted to Be*. Her book and the MyShingle blog are specifically designed to inspire other lawyers to go solo, and they have also brought her speaking engagements which have led to more exposure.

Elefant's advice to lawyers considering going solo is, "Prepare yourself substantively. Spend a few months reading listservs and books about starting a firm. Most state bars have a course on how to start a law firm. Sometimes you need to leave your employing firm to start building your own practice, but be sure to look before you leap."

#### **CREATING MICRONETWORKS WITH OTHER WOMEN**

Females who are running solo or small firms can easily become isolated, especially if they go directly home from the office every day. That's when creativity in networking is especially important. Sari Gabay-Rafiy and her partner Anne Marie Bowler run a small firm, Gabay-Rafiy & Bowler LLP, and they have built their own network of female lawyers who refer business to one another. Gabay-Rafiy comments, "We take full advantage of opportunities to network with women. We've developed a network of other attorneys to whom we can refer business, and who think of our firm when their client has a litigation issue."

Gabay-Rafiy explains that she and Bowler just moved into new office space which is larger than their current

needs require. They are leasing the extra space to other female solo attorneys who specialize in different practice areas. "If one of our clients is buying a new home, we send him or her down the hall to Laurie Slosberg, a real estate attorney. If clients have transactional needs beyond our scope, we send them to Nicole Marra, a corporate attorney who does contracts in the entertainment industry."

### **MOVING IN-HOUSE**

Corporate counsel jobs are highly desirable in many cases, since the hours are often less punishing than what is required for law firm associates and partners. However, because these jobs are in demand, they can be tough to get.

Attorney Maia Spilman went in-house for the first time at a large record label, a position she found through a friend of a friend. Though her contact made it clear to Spilman that they had no openings available, she offered to take the woman out to lunch anyway. Two weeks later, Spilman received a call from the company's human resources department, and four months later she got a job working in-house at the record company.

Spilman stayed at the label a few years, but after 9/11, the industry suffered greatly and she was subsequently one of many that were laid off. She decided to try her hand at being a solo. She went out on her own to be an independent lawyer and she continued to develop her niche working with musicians and record companies.

Determined to make it as a solo, Spilman invested in attending an expensive international conference called MIDEEM, which is the largest music industry conference in the world. There, she encountered a

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startup digital distribution company called INgrooves, which became a small client. After several years, the company had grown significantly. They became a monthly retainer client of Spilman's, and, in time, a core client. They eventually offered her a position as their director of legal and business affairs. She accepted the job and was later promoted to executive vp of business and legal affairs, though she still maintains an independent law practice in her spare time.

Spilman says, "You have to be willing to make the investment and commitment of money and time. To make attending MIDEEM worthwhile, I had to go back for a second time to see lots of people I had met the previous year. The critical thing is that none of this happened right away. You have to be in it for the long haul and somehow figure it out."

### **CONSIDER THE E-DISCOVERY FIELD**

Moving in-house to corporations is not the only non-law-firm move to make inside the legal industry, though. One area that is definitely booming is the electronic discovery (e-Discovery) services market of companies which help law firms and corporate counsel manage the litigation process and process electronic data.

Amy Hinzmann is VP of Discovery Strategy for DiscoverReady, a discovery management company which outsources the document review process for Fortune 500 companies. Right out of law school, Hinzmann worked at a Texas law firm, Jenkins & Gilchrist. A few years later, she moved in-house to Merrill Lynch to work as a securities attorney. She became a specialist in arbitration, but came to feel pigeonholed and limited in the scope of her work.

In early 2008, Hinzmann was considering making a move, given the difficulties Merrill was experiencing and the general economic turnaround. Michelle Nichols, a former colleague from Jenkins, was working at DiscoverReady and had been encouraging Amy to consider a job

the in eDiscovery field. Hinzmann says, "Michelle and I kept in touch through my move to Merrill Lynch, and eventually she e-mailed to ask me if I knew anyone who could head up DiscoverReady's financial services practice. I e-mailed back and said, 'how about me?'" Hinzmann's example proves that maintaining contacts in your network, even after you've left a position, can pay off in making job transitions.

### **LEAVING LEGAL BEHIND**

While there are many exciting opportunities within legal for women to consider, some decide that it is not for them. Jessica Porter fits into this category. For several years, she worked at various law firms, doing anything from bankruptcy work to anti-trust and plaintiff work. Though she was never passionate about practicing law, she kept trying to find the right fit.

Porter had been an art history major in college, and she was always interested in art. Her lawyer colleagues knew this about her and eventually began to contact her when they were ready to replace their college posters with real art. Eventually, Porter realized that she could make a business of creating a virtual online gallery and marketing art directly to lawyers. She started Raandesk Gallery in 2006, naming it after a fictional word she had dreamed up as a child. Porter says, "The whole idea of the gallery came from law. My attorney colleagues were buying art online and I realized I could help them find the right pieces."

Porter now represents several artists on her online gallery, and she is very happy to have transitioned out of legal. "I left legal because I didn't enjoy the atmosphere of being at a big or mid-sized firm. The money, reputation and status were great, but I was miserable. Women need to be passionate about what they do. It's much easier for me to network for the gallery than it was when I was a lawyer, because I'm genuinely enthusiastic about the gallery, and that comes through to others."

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There's no reason for women lawyers to live in quiet desperation, especially when there are many so interesting avenues available to explore. Continuing to build your personal and professional networks can lead to exciting and lucrative

opportunities. In *Walden*, Thoreau also says, " ... I wished to live deliberately ... and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." Networking can be the key to making a transition to a job situation that is more enjoyable, rewarding and

lucrative, so why not start now? At worst, you'll make new friends, and at best, you'll find the right opportunity that will make you look forward to going to work every day.



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