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Getting to Know You: Meeting Each Other in the Emergence

Restrictions are being lifted, so we can reactivate the old ways of socializing and networking. Without relinquishing the advantages of technology or disabling your office Twitter account, you can boldly step forward into the past.

By **Marc Garfinkle** | October 01, 2021



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Eighty-five years ago, self-improvement pioneer Dale Carnegie published “How to Win Friends and Influence People,” the classic book about human interaction, personal improvement, and public speaking that would sell over 30 million copies and propel to lasting popularity the genre of self-improvement books that is now standard bookshelf fare. Carnegie gave practical, easy-to-follow tips for improving communication skills based on principles that were true in all environments.

Over the years, many who applied the Carnegie method did well in business and in life, frequently giving credit to Carnegie for their success. Bargain of the century? For the price of a library card, you gained a professional edge in communication, credibility and popularity—attributes that serve attorneys well and pay

dividends for life. Eighty-five years later, Carnegie's method is as effective as ever.

But, there is a catch. The Carnegie method presupposes that the winning of friends and influencing of people would take place in an actual physical locus with real brick-and-mortar people—an increasingly rare circumstance these days. Almost overnight, Carnegie's world has morphed into something he would not comprehend. Direct, face-to-face interpersonal contact is no longer required for winning friends or influencing people. Business, even BIG business, even big LAW, no longer requires people to meet—or even speak with—each other. Valuable employees are hired and fired and even retired without ever needing to meet a single coworker.

Acquiring clients is the same way. You never need to meet one, anymore, because they don't need to meet you. These days, people believe they can learn more about you on the internet than over coffee. At their leisure, they can learn where you went to school, every place you ever worked, whom your friends are, and what others say about you. They can learn your children's names, what your house is worth, that you like sailboats, and that in 2018, you were briefly on the List of Ineligible Attorneys because of CLE credits. They may see your video posts or podcasts, read the published case you lost, or find out that your burglar alarm goes off too often. If they like what they see they may be willing to retain you with no further research.

A lawyer with a web presence and an ad campaign can acquire 10,000 clients without bumping fists or looking anyone in the eye or being able to see what they are wearing on their feet. Today, a lawyer can post billboards across the state saying nothing but her name and profession and have instant renown and financial success. You can stay local, too. An active presence on neighborhood virtual bulletin boards may be all that a lawyer needs to maintain a busy practice. Of course, a great SEO team boosting your website up the Google ladder will make you more readily “findable” to potential clients who may never shake your hand.

Maybe you are one of those aggressive, progressive law firms that gets new clients by using colleagues' names and law firms' names for your competitive keyword ad campaign. You know that the New Jersey Supreme Court still allows you to purchase those from Google for *sub rosa* use on your website, so you do. (For the uninformed, imagine that you had a question for an ethics attorney, so you decided to call Attorney Ray Londa, who has ably handled such matters since the memory of man runneth not to the contrary and has generated barnfuls of good will across the state. You type his name into the Google search box, and the first thing that pops up is *my ad*, with a link to my website. Sorry, Ray. Business is business.)

We are losing the personal touch, the ability to relate and interrelate, to understand each other and to empathize. Even before the pandemic it was evident. Children who spend their childhoods indoors or in solitude with touch screens and video monitors and Zoom links— children who play games with computers (or with each other through computers)—become adults that have socialization issues unknown to prior generations.

But lose not heart, dear reader. I know the way; it is the old way. COVID-19 restrictions are being lifted, so we can reactivate the old ways of socializing and networking. Without relinquishing the advantages of technology, taking down your Pinterest page or disabling your office Twitter account, you can boldly step forward into the past.

Here's how:

As we come out of hiding, as we let down our masks, as our institutions reopen and public meetings become safe, let's get back to basics.

Start by preparing an elevator speech, quickly describing what you do, keeping it short enough to not be obnoxious. Join state, county and local bar associations and attend their meetings. Better yet, become active. (Even better, lead!) Likewise, get active in their practice groups. Get involved with community-outreach

projects of the bar or the other institutions to which you belong. For more impact, attend or sponsor their events. Remember that the other people there are your colleagues and not your competitors—you will have much more fun telling war stories than if you were vying for a chunk of each other's practice.

Go out to lunch with other attorneys. Meet face-to-face again and recall what it means to enjoy yourself among colleagues. Call Bob Gallop and find out how to start your own lawyers networking group. Go to places where lawyers are; not only will you be reconnecting with our professional community, but you will also hone and polish your skills as a professional communicator. You will gain valuable combat experience making friends and refreshing friendships, being yourself and finding synergy. Bring newer lawyers with you who may not know how to "work a room" or hand out a card.

We are emerging from a bad dream. We need to reunite. We need to understand each other and to see how, as colleagues and friends and neighbors, we can help each other through the challenges to come. As the world gets safer for us, we need to get to know each other again. We need the skills to do that, and they don't come free with the license.

See you next month ... hopefully in person.

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