



CAREER SERVICES OFFICE

Networking

Five Impediments (to Overcome) When Working a Room

Excerpted in part from *Jobs For Lawyers*, by Hillary Mantis and Kathleen Brady

In order to successfully work a room you will have to overcome five major obstacles and be prepared to challenge some deeply ingrained societal beliefs you always considered to be nonnegotiable.

1. An aggressive approach to socializing is impolite.

We have grown up believing that it is tacky to use people for personal gain. Being polite means being unobtrusive, not asking direct questions, not talking about our personal lives and drawing as little attention to ourselves as possible. But, by freely acknowledging that attending an event is good for you because it will provide you with the opportunity to develop business, or to have a more active social life, or because it makes you feel good to support a cause or make new friends, or because it provides you with access to potential employers, you will eliminate the feeling of "dishonesty" and "tackiness" and be able to enjoy the event.

2. One should not talk to strangers.

Ever since we were children our parents instilled a fear in us about talking to people we did not know. One way to overcome this obstacle would be to consider what it is we have in common with others at the event. Are they all fellow attorneys or alumni or parents or church members or supporters of a political candidate, etc.? Determining the common bond makes it easier to approach people because then they are no longer "strangers." You can then begin a conversation based on the common bond.

3. One needs to be properly introduced.

Because it is not always feasible to be introduced by a mutual acquaintance you may need to "properly introduce" yourself. Design a 10-15 second introduction that is clear, interesting and well-delivered. Your goal should be not only to tell people who you are but also to **give people a pleasant experience of you**. Naturally, what you say will depend on the nature of the event. For example:

- At an ABA convention: "Hello, my name is Lisa Green. I am a second-year law student from Touro Law Center."
- At a wedding: "Hello, my name is Lisa Green. I am a former college roommate of the bride."

Remember, the most important person you can introduce yourself to is the host. It is that person's job to make sure everyone is having a good time and the host will help you to meet other people in the room.

4. Fear of rejection.

This obstacle is more imagined than real. Very few people will be openly hostile or rude, if for no other reason than that it is bad business. To help overcome this fear, try adapting a "host mentality." Hosts are concerned with the comfort of others and actively contribute to that comfort. By focusing on making others feel welcomed and included, you will become more comfortable. If you are met with rudeness, do not take it personally. There may be a hundred reasons why that person is not receptive. Simply move on.

5. Discomfort with small talk.

If you read a newspaper, you are ready for small talk! Also, reading special interest publications can give you a quick overview of what is happening in any business region. Check the directory called *Bacon's Publicity Checker*, which lists over 17,000 magazines, journals and newsletters indexed by categories that cover everything.