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# A Guide to Referrals and Networking for Extroverts and Introverts Alike

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**M**ost professionals agree that one of the most valuable ways to attract clients is through referrals. When starting a practice, the most expedient source of clients is people you already know, including family, friends, and former classmates. While cultivating these relationships is the immediate first step, creating and implementing a strategic networking plan is a close second. By showing up and meeting people in person, you will have the opportunity to create new relationships and deepen those that already exist. Not only can you meet new clients and referral sources, but you also can build a strong support system, which has its own value.

Even attorneys who are veteran networkers often engage in random acts of networking without developing advanced communication skills and systems that will greatly enhance the effectiveness of every encounter.

## Networking and Personality

The communication styles of introverts and extroverts normally differ widely. An understanding of these styles can help you learn to adapt your own approach to the environment in which you find yourself so that you can increase your chances of making a viable connection with your communication partner.

Co-author Cynthia Sharp has taken the personality test designed with the input of Susan Cain, author of *New York Times* Best Seller *Quiet* and founder of the Quiet Revolution (the personality test is found at

[quietrev.com/the-introvert-test](http://quietrev.com/the-introvert-test)). Co-author Cedric Ashley has taken and is a qualified administrator of the Myer-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) assessment. We have each been found to be basically in the middle of the introvert/extrovert spectrum and self-identify as ambiverts. We refer those interested in finding out more about various aspects of this topic to the website of the Quiet Revolution ([quietrev.com](http://quietrev.com)), as an in-depth discussion is beyond the scope of this article.

Our approach is to offer networking tips from the perspective of the introvert and the extrovert in three separate settings: (1) large networking event, (2) small networking event (one-on-one or one-to-few); and (3) networking by speaking or presenting (one-to-many). Cedric provides tips to the introvert while Cindy gives suggestions to the extrovert.

## Large Networking Event

**Introvert.** Get ready! Get psyched! Get hyped! If you tend to be an introvert, you really need to get ready for these energy-sapping events. This is not your natural space, so planning ahead will go a long way to make the event worthwhile. Even the little details matter. Picking an ideal time to arrive and depart (the “bookends”) is a starter. Planning to arrive a little after the start of the event will provide sufficient time for attendees to gather.

Have a talk plan in place. Come prepared with two or three small “chitchat” topics that will guide you through conversations with people you may not know. I like the broad question, such as, “so where are you from?” The question alone is so broad that



the person will likely seek clarification, which in turn will allow you to follow up with options such as place of birth, employer, childhood home, tribe, whatever. Depending on how the person chooses to answer the question, you will find an easy opening because it gives some insight as to what is top-of-mind for him or her.

As you are engaged in conversation, be sincere and by all means pay attention. By listening intently, you will be able to ask follow-up questions and allow people to talk, and talk, and talk about themselves or whatever they care to talk about. This is certainly the case when talking with an extrovert. And by the time the conversation is over, you will have found a new “friend.” Of course, if the person you are speaking with is just as sparing with their words as you, it is possible you are chatting with your kindred spirit—another introvert. Not a problem, having read this article and being the insightful and astute person you are, you just might turn the topic to the fact that you are an introvert and you have to work yourself up to attend this type of event. And BAAAAAM! Just like that you have opened the door for the fellow member of your introvert tribe to self-identify, and the conversation just flows from there.

Remember that as an introvert your natural energy focuses inward, so after several hours of this type of event you just might want to go home and crash. But that is okay.

**Extrovert.** Prior to attending the event, identify what you wish to gain from this investment of time and money. What type of potential referral source or client would you like to meet? Are you able to obtain the guest list ahead of time to help you prepare? Simply catching up socially with people you already know could be accomplished in another venue. The following three strategies will help you leverage your natural ability to meet and mingle:

- Prepare for the function by doing a little research. If attending an association meeting, take a quick look at the website so that you are up-to-date on the organization’s publications as well as news about the members. For example, a novice business attorney who did her home-

work ahead of a recent meeting of the local chamber of commerce was able to break the ice with an influential banker by complimenting him on a recent newsletter article and to congratulate the vice president of a small company on a recent promotion. If attending the meeting of a specific industry, make sure you are up-to-date on current developments. Karen, a lawyer who represents medical practices, is up-to-date and conversant with news related to the health care industry at both the local and national level. This enables her to engage in informed conversation in both the business and legal arenas.

- Use social media or other resources to research the background of any scheduled speakers, board members, and other key people who may be attending. Connect through LinkedIn, Twitter, or e-mail prior to the event, letting them know that you look forward to meeting. You have now warmed the atmosphere for an in-person encounter. Use the information to develop probing questions. My favorite go-to question when the energy of the conversation wanes is “What is the biggest challenge that you are facing in your industry/business?” Answers to this simple, open-ended question are educational and position us to understand the potential clients’ needs so that we can demonstrate that we are the right attorney to prevent or solve their problems.
- Engage fully while conversing. Glancing around the room, at your watch, or at your cell phone sends an unattractive message to your conversation partner. Many lawyers (and other adults) have unfortunately not mastered basic social skills. Be sure that you’re not one of them.

#### **Small Networking Event**

**Introvert.** Smaller networking events might be the sweet spot for introverts, allowing them to operate in their natural space. These events are ideal because they provide the opportunity for depth of interaction, not breadth. Here the introvert is able to focus on making greater, more meaningful connections with a fewer number of people. By their nature these smaller events will inevitably have a format that is less high-energy and likely less fast-paced.



The intimate feel of these events will likely put the introvert at ease. Ironically, for introverts these events may be better than one-to-one or one-to-few encounters. With a one-to-one encounter, introverts may feel as though they are an equal partner in keeping the conversation moving along. This in turn may bring about stress for the introvert (not always and not for everyone because some introverts may just flourish in this environment). But with the small networking event, there are enough people where introverts can share the load.

The depth, connection, and familiarity that can exist in these smaller events can create a space for introverts to emerge to the point that they appear to be extroverts. Sounds strange? Not so. We all can exist and function along points of the spectrum—in fact, many introverts are excellent trial attorneys. However, we can't not operate outside of our hard-wired nature for too long or too often. Just like a battery, once we are run down we will need to find our natural source to recharge.

**Extrovert.** Psychologist Carl Jung originated the categories of introvert and extrovert and described an extrovert as a “person whose motives and actions are directed outward.” By and large, this characteristic can often drive extroverts to dominate conversations because most love to talk. While the introvert conversation partner may be entertained, he or she has not had the “space” to express himself or herself, which means that the extrovert has gained little knowledge or insight from the conversation. The following approaches are geared to improving communication skills and could be useful to extroverts and introverts alike.

- Develop sensitivity to distinctions in communication and personality types that will help in developing rapport and interacting on a deeper level. Reviewing the results of a DISC assessment that I took helped me greatly in understanding how to approach others who are different from me. Learn how to identify and work best with introverts as well as other extroverts.
- Become a respectful listener. All too often, extroverts and introverts alike are guilty of “self-listening,” which means that they are

focusing on their own clever thoughts and constructing their next sentence instead of giving full attention to their conversation partner. Space limitations prevent me from elaborating on this critical topic. Check out [listen.org](http://listen.org) (the website of the International Listening Association) for significant resources and tools.

- Ask open-ended questions of your conversation partner and then step back, giving him or her a chance to speak. Ask follow-up questions and always keep in mind that “still waters run deep.” You never know what you will learn by digging just a little.

### **Networking by Speaking or Presenting**

**Introvert.** You may be asking, “Are you serious? Me? Public Speaking?” Yes, you indeed. Being hard-wired as an introvert is not a limitation. It is just one beginning point of your personality makeup. You would be surprised at the number of great public speakers and presenters who are introverts. Being an introvert has no bearing on your ability to get up before small or large groups to speak. And the road to that platform is not difficult at all.

As disclosed already, I am an ambivert leaning towards introvert. Yet, I have presented or delivered speeches on numerous occasions. I am also a trial attorney, so I regularly try cases before juries. The fact that I'm not an extrovert does not mean that I cannot engage in extroverted activities. Does it mean that it will take a little more effort? Yes. But it will also depend on activity. A loud, large, fast networking event is much different than trying a case before a jury or speaking before a large audience on a topic with which you are fully engaged. As much as the delivery of the content is an extrovert activity, even much more time was invested in the introverted activity (being in your own head and thoughts) of preparing the materials for presentation.

Moreover, being hard-wired as an introvert does not mean you can't deliver a presentation with zeal, emotion, and enthusiasm. Every Sunday (well most Sundays) I am in my church listening to my pastor deliver home run sermons before several thousand attendees. He also regularly preaches and speaks around the world. But if you listen closely to



his comments and musings, you will also hear him speak about the solitude, aloneness, and me time that he cherishes.

You, too, can join the ranks of introverted public speakers. There are lot or great thoughts you have inside. Do yourself and the world a favor by sharing them with others.

**Extrovert.** Budget time so as to arrive early and leave late. Because lawyers are typically stretched thin, they often arrive at a speaking venue with only a few moments to spare before “showtime” and then careen out of the room immediately upon completing the presentation. This defeats one of the objectives of delivering the speech, which is to create and deepen relationships with audience members in the hope of gaining a new client or developing a referral source. Arriving early gives you an opportunity to network and your “new friends” and can help with audience connection during your actual presentation. Because I make it a practice of remembering a few names, I can engage during the speech as follows: “Larry and I were chatting before we began today’s session, and he related a unique way that his firm conducts memorable real estate settlements. Larry, do you mind telling everyone about your process”? Naturally, I would have his permission before beginning this line of conversation. After he tells his story, I then ask if other attendees have something to share, and many will jump on the bandwagon since another person “went first.”

Begin with the end in mind. What is the best results you can attain from giving the presentation, aside from the satisfaction that comes with sharing your knowledge. Certainly, you would like to attract both clients and referral sources. Perhaps you would like to develop more speaking opportunities. At the end of the presentation, “make the ask.” Don’t forget to practice this portion of the speech extensively before you take the platform.

Create a system that enables you to make periodic follow-up connections with audience members. Most speakers make little effort to create or deepen relationships with attendees beyond offering to distribute business cards or brochures (which may or may not end up in the nearest waste basket). The following suggestions are designed to elicit contact information from audience members. Naturally, it is your responsibility to actually follow up. Which ones

of these suggestions would attorneys in your firm be willing to implement?

- Encourage the attendees to connect on social media while displaying a slide with icons of the lawyer’s preferred platforms (e.g., LinkedIn, Twitter).
- Extend an invitation to sign up for the firm’s newsletter by leaving business cards with the speaker or by sending an e-mail.
- Offer to send an article, checklist, or other valuable content on request.
- Mention future live or virtual educational sessions in which the attorney is a featured expert.
- Ask attendees to complete an evaluation form.

### Conclusion

Whether you fall on the extrovert, ambivert, or introvert side of the personality spectrum, you should remember this is only the starting point, not the destination. Regardless of how nature has hard-wired you, it is important that you stretch yourself to operate outside your comfort zone to explore other perspectives. The ultimate goal is to become a fully developed human being. In no way should you interpret this article as giving you an excuse to say I can’t do it, or I’m not good at that because I’m a \_\_\_\_\_vert.

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