

## Networking: From Connections to Relationships

According to Merriam-Webster, networking is “the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions, *specifically*: the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business.”<sup>1</sup>

At its core, networking is about developing professional and social relationships. There are many advantages to networking, including:

- **Shared Knowledge:** Connecting with paralegals is key to increasing your knowledge by fostering the exchange of ideas, experiences, and perspectives. Networking also allows you to learn from seasoned paralegals whose insight and background can help strengthen your professional growth.
- **Opportunities:** Networking may create opportunities, including employment offers. Building strong professional connections can help you identify and pursue these opportunities as they develop.
- **Connection:** Building connections goes beyond making contacts. It is about fostering meaningful relationships that can open the door to new perspectives, opportunities, and resources.
- **Confidence:** Stepping outside your comfort zone to network can help build confidence with each interaction. Over time, this confidence translates into a self-assured presence and an energy that others respond to positively.
- **Visibility:** Networking allows people to become familiar with your skills and experience. These connections can help elevate your professional profile and establish you as a knowledgeable, reliable, and supportive paralegal.

The idea of networking can conjure anxiety, as well as images of the eager beaver handing out their business card to get a job. However, it does not have to be that way. In fact, it is often more effective to approach networking without looking to get anything out of it except connections. Focus your efforts on building relationships—preferably in person—with no expectations, and you might be surprised how this comes in handy over the future months, years, or even decades.

Here are a couple of suggestions on where and how to start.

- Join your local NALA affiliate, paralegal association(s), or voluntary bar association. Start attending events and socials to connect with other legal professionals.
- Create a LinkedIn profile and keep it up to date.
- Make a professional Facebook page and/or Instagram account, and look for contacts. Search for paralegal/legal assistant Facebook groups to join, where you can connect, ask questions, and exchange insights.
- Attend continuing legal education (CLE) offerings to advance your legal knowledge and connect with other professionals.

Networking is an essential tool for the modern-day paralegal/legal assistant, fostering professional growth, expanding knowledge, building confidence, and creating opportunities that extend well beyond the workplace. Get out there and network!

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/networking>