

Network with a Purpose, Lawyers Advised

■ By Raymond M. Williams

PRODUCTIVITY EXPERT NEEN JAMES acknowledged that networking is key to business development for solo and small firm attorneys, but encouraged attorneys to engage in what she refers to as “pro-networking.”

Pro-networking is networking with a purpose, James said at the May 28 joint meeting of the Solo and Small Firm Committee and the Marketing Committee of the Law Practice Management Division. “It is proactive, productive and, most importantly, profitable.”

James pointed out that all too often, the focus of networking is on the event, conjuring images of endless handshaking and forced interaction with strangers, which leaves many attorneys with feelings of anxiety and negativity at the mention of the word. For attorneys who wish to successfully make the transition from “traditional” networking to pro-networking, James provided the following tips:

- Be strategic. Think strategically and do your research before accepting an invitation to an event. Take time to determine whether members of your

target audience will be in attendance. Also, evaluate the potential for building strategic alliances. Finally, consider your “return on networking.” Think of the time you will spend at the event, preparation time prior to the event, and follow-up time subsequent to the event in the context of your hourly rate (i.e., time spent not practicing law).

- Change the focus and methods of networking. Instead of approaching networking with a “what’s in it for me” attitude, start thinking about what it is you can do to help the person with whom you are speaking. It is also important to “get beyond the nametag.” Help others to get beyond your nametag by explaining to them what it is you actually do. Be more than just “an attorney at ABC firm.” By the same token, don’t assume that a person cannot help you simply because of the title on his or her nametag. If that person cannot give you business, he or she may know someone who can. In addition, realize that other attorneys are not necessarily your competition. Explore opportunities for referrals and other strategic alliances. Finally, your business card is your shop front. Make sure it properly represents your business. Give it with



Neen James encourages attorneys to be proactive when it comes to networking.

importance and receive others’ cards in a way that conveys their importance to you.

- Broaden your view of what networking is. Networking is marketing. As such, it need not always involve a group or cost money. Networking can be as simple as a phone call, e-mail, sending someone a newspaper clipping or handwritten note, publishing an article, or serving on the board of a professional or community organization.

- Devote time to networking. Net-

Neen James offered tips to make networking proactive, productive and profitable.

working should be a daily activity. After attending a planned networking event, devote at least 15 minutes a day to follow-up during the week after the event. At all times, have a list of five target people, firms or companies. Most importantly, leverage your current network. Cultivate the contacts you already have.

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