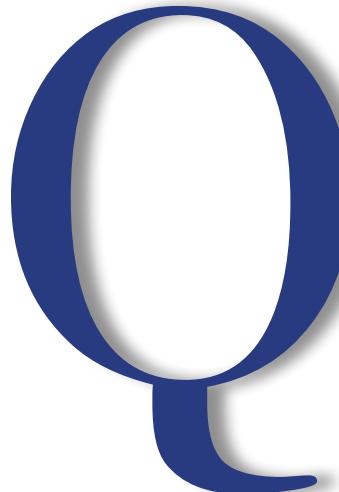




Roundtable Member
Gabriella O'Rourke,
Group Practice Manager
of the Commercial
Litigation Group for
Borden Ladner Gervais
LLP (BLG), shared her
perspective with our team
on how to maintain your
network.

Mentoring MATTERS



I know how important networking is, but it always falls to the bottom of the pile with all the other work that needs to get done. Then I feel guilty reaching out to people to keep in touch when the time has lapsed. What strategies can I use to stay relevant to my network and stay on their radar?

If I told you I had the magic answer to this dilemma, I'd be lying. Either that or I'd be rich! The truth is, there is never enough time in the day to do everything we think we should - complete that project, get to the gym, spend quality time with the kids or friends, feed our creative soul. The list of things we don't get to can become endless and overwhelming.

However, if you don't find a way to network habitually, eventually you can find yourself in a very barren place in terms of career progression and job satisfaction. We've all heard the expression "it's not what you know but who you know...", and there is a truth to that in terms of sponsorship, support and opening the door to opportunities. I would go further and add "it's precisely because of who you know and how you interact with them, that you can do what you do...". The people who actively nurture and protect their network over the span of their career are the ones who ultimately produce the greatest net-worth for themselves and their organizations, and who stay current and valuable in the face of constant change. None of us can do it alone and none of us has the answer to every challenge we face. Humans are social creatures by nature and we learn through our interactions with others. So, no matter how critical that piece of work is, or how pressing that deadline, maintaining your network is just as crucial to your ongoing viability as a leader.

The good news is, that it is absolutely possible to pick up networking where you left off and you'll still be ahead of the curve compared to others who keep procrastinating. You are not the only one who finds it difficult to build in time and who gets consumed by work. No one will think less of you for calling out of the blue or sending them an email to reconnect, provided your reasons for doing so are not entirely one-sided. If I only ever hear from you when you want something, you are not networking – you're leeching.

The key to staying relevant and on other people's radar is to make sure that when you do reach out to people you are conscious of what their interests and needs might be and not solely focused on your own agenda.

There are so many good reasons to invest time in networking, but at any given time perhaps one of these reasons becomes primary - seeking opportunities for career progression or business development, finding insights for personal development and

support, expanding your knowledge and skills in a new area, finding information to help with a challenging business problem, recruiting new team members. Whatever your reasons for wanting to reach out and connect with people, you must remember that you have as much to offer to your network in these areas as they have to offer you.

There are people you have in your network because when you met them, something about them 'clicked'. You found them to be a like-minded soul, or you enjoyed something about the conversation you had. Others are there because maybe you worked with them, for them, or one day aspire to be them. Likewise, almost everyone you meet will still be on his or her own career journey. Even those who are several steps ahead of you in their career may still be actively engaged in finding their next challenge or in developing in new areas. Perhaps you have information they might not have, or you are able to connect them to someone else in your network who they don't already know. Maybe you know of an opportunity that might be of interest to them.

The way to become truly relevant, meaningful and memorable to your network, regardless of how little time you may have to engage, is to ensure that the relationship includes a healthy balance of 'how can they help me' and 'what's in it for them'.

Here are my top ten tips for maintaining your network with limited time:

- 1) Schedule time into your calendar, even if you have to book it weeks in advance. Make a repeating note in your calendar to call a given number of your contacts every Tuesday afternoon, for example. Evidence shows that we are much more likely to make time for something when we have made an appointment and we see regular reminders coming up in our outlook.
- 2) If you are not sure where to begin, start by reviewing your LinkedIn contacts. Who haven't you been in touch with for a while? Who have you heard has recently made a change (great starting point – "how are you getting on in the new role?" ...). If you could just contact 1 person, who should that be?

- 3) With limited time to work with, sometimes a quick scan of LinkedIn and firing off a couple of quick messages can be enough to get the ball rolling and can show people that you're thinking of them – checking in, wondering how you're doing, time for a catch up etc.
- 4) Make it easy for people to learn what you're doing. Update your own LinkedIn with new information. Share a project or an article you found interesting. It only takes a moment and it can be an easy way to stay on people's radar.
- 5) If you only have a few minutes a week, use that time to scan LinkedIn and other social networks for content others have posted. Like, share and comment in ways that demonstrate you are interested in the things they are working on.
- 6) Use the natural opportunities that arise. When you see a press release or a news article about something your contact's company has done, or something that is happening in their industry, flip it to them and use it as a moment of connection.
- 7) If you see that someone has a new assignment, has been nominated for an award, has been recognized for some new career goal or has recently made a change, send a personalized note congratulating them. A quick email will suffice but short handwritten notes via snail mail will have an exponential and lasting effect. Keep a stack of stationary cards and stamps close by to make this a simple task.
- 8) Sometimes the most valuable thing you can do is to share your network. I have been known to arrange dinners inviting 7-8 of my network contacts who don't yet know each other. I call it the Table of Inspiration and purposefully invite people who I think may benefit from meeting each other. You get to network with several people at once and every time they reconnect with someone from the dinner they remember who first introduced them.
- 9) When new job opportunities come across your desk that are not a fit for you, think of someone in your network who might find the opportunity interesting. Flip it to them with a personalised note.

- 10) Don't forget to network internally within your organisation, at every level. You never know where that next idea may come from and who you might need in your corner for the next project or challenge. Pay attention to the small stuff – names, spellings, significant people in their lives. This is just one of the ways you show people that you genuinely care and you're not just in it for yourself.

If you do these things when you can, when time gets even tighter, there will be enough goodwill and elasticity built into your network to last until you can find some breathing space again.



Gabriella O'Rourke is currently serving as the Group Practice Manager of the Commercial Litigation Group for Borden Ladner Gervais LLP (BLG) - the largest Canadian-based full-service law firm. In this role she is accountable for improving total group performance in a number of critical areas, including financial performance (P&L), pricing, business strategy, talent and workforce planning, process improvements and client service standards.

Before BLG, she served as the Director of Marketing and Business Development for a regional law firm and has held National Marketing and Business Development leadership roles at international consulting firms Grant Thornton and KPMG respectively.



Glain Roberts-McCabe is passionate about the art of leadership and supporting ambitious mid-career leaders. She created **The Roundtable** to provide emerging leaders with the navigational skills, tools and savvy needed to manage increases in scope, pressure and leadership complexity.