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Networking to Build Your Practice: How a Top Immigration Lawyer Did Just That!

Each of you reading this CAN form a similar successful network that works. Look into your own personal rolodexes and find successful people who don't compete and organize a formal group.

BY STACY WEST CLARK

I have known Michele Madera, a partner at Klasko Immigration Law, since she was a new associate. She was always incredibly smart and competent at helping her multinational corporate clients solve their immigration matters—but there was something else that I liked so much about her. She literally always had a smile on her face, was incredibly welcoming and just a pleasure to be around. Clients, no doubt, loved working with her.

What I did not realize at the time, was that she was a born business developer. Since moving to Philadelphia just six years ago, she has built her book of business to seven figures (!!!)—helping companies in such fields as telecommunications, pharmaceuticals and financial services administer successful programs to hire and retain skilled workers from abroad in full compliance with immigration laws. She attributes her success, very humbly, as due to “her understanding of how to balance the needs of her employer client, with the needs of the employee/foreign

national and always remembering that “great legal work coupled with outstanding service, will result in more work.”

While I had not seen Michele in many years, she landed on my radar when I saw she was a speaker on a law firm marketing panel with Corinne Brennan of Klehr Harrison Harvey Branzburg regarding a networking group that they were a part of that actually was creating referrals and opportunities for them. And they were good ones.

So, I thought I would share with you the secret sauce of Michele's thriving networking group. It's a great model for every lawyer to follow.

A group formed with deliberation. In 2017, a handful of women from many different industries, including but not limited to the law, decided to form a structured formal networking group that they asked Michele to join. She was of course, the only immigration lawyer in the group so it seemed like an attractive opportunity for her. While Michele had participated in traditional in-person networking events, she wanted to be a part of a group with mature, uber-smart and



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motivated professionals who would be consistently thinking about her practice and how they could help her. Now instead of just being one person looking to grow her practice, she had 10 other people in the group, not just knowing what she did, but specifically tasked with thinking of her for referrals, invitations and more concrete leads and opportunities. Genius right? Plus, the group was all women. The original founders had seen their male colleagues doing this successfully and thought: We can and should do this too. And they did.

Selection of group members. The selection of group members was “a collaborative project” according to Michele. They were looking for women who did not compete with each other, who were at levels at their jobs where business development was required and who were hungry to grow their books of business.

Members today include a financial consultant, an auditor, a lawyer from a well-rounded Philadelphia firm, an executive recruiter, a human resources consultant, a business valuation expert, a public relations/communications professional, a technology consultant, and a commercial real estate professional, and all are looking for the same kind of high-level clients in different industries. While their businesses are different, they are all working toward a common goal.

How Does it Work? The group meets monthly, and now during COVID via Zoom. Each member is required to come up with “3 Asks.” That means they each must give the group the names of three people they want to meet or opportunities they would love to have. It is then the other members’ responsibility to make these introductions happen.

In addition, there is monthly “spotlight” program whereby one member gets the chance to go deep and tell the group: all about her work and the exact kind of clients she is looking for, with what kinds of needs and from what kinds of industries.

Michele recently had the spotlight. After laying out her business development goals, members then for the next three-and-a-half weeks had the homework assignment (this was not a loosey goosey request) to see who they could introduce Michele to shortly. At

the next meeting, there was very real accountability and followup. Michele had several introductory meetings with potential clients and referral sources. It was a great way to further her network in Philadelphia.

Everyone knows they have to do the work. Those who don’t may be gently asked to step up their game which I am told, they normally then do after such a reminder.

Training and special events, Performing the actual “ask” does not come naturally to many. Several years ago, the group brought in a coach to give members tips on how to do the ask and how to make such introductions a warmer more comfortable event—thus increasing their productivity. One suggestion was to make it a “warm introduction”- so the connector would join in on the initial meeting. This created a more comfortable atmosphere, and also deepened the connection for all involved.

In addition, the group hosted a successful champagne tasting event that had 50 to 75 corporate attendees, called a “Toast to Connections.” This was going to become an annual event, but has been put on hold due to COVID-19. They look forward to when they can safely hold this event again.

Today, three years after its founding, there is a definite buzz on the street about this group. The women refuse to give it a catchy name- but have heard it referred to as the “Toast” group after their signature event.

Have the members gotten real financial results? The answer is unequivocally YES. At the end of the year, the group analyzes the past year and looks at: the number of new clients each has gotten, the revenue

streams created and the new opportunities (like introductions to new people and speaking gigs) that came to group members.

I asked Michele if she had hard numbers to point to resulting from her participation in the group. Indeed, she told me she has gotten new corporate clients from the introductions which have resulted in five figures worth of new revenue to her—just in 2019 alone. Other members report similar milestones achieved, while others find the growth of their networks to be especially fruitful.

I will keep Michele’s practice now in my sites and refer to her as not just an exemplary lawyer and great person, but as someone who can teach the entire legal community how to do business development the right way.

Each of you reading this CAN form a similar successful network that works. Look into your own personal rolodexes and find successful people who don’t compete and organize a formal group like Michele did. Maybe members are all classmates from college or law school, or your neighbors or just people you personally work with and get started. As always, I am rooting for you and here to help.

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