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Embrace change. Stepping outside your comfort zone provides career growth. Take smart risks – those with the greatest impact do not play it safe.

Networking is critical at all stages of your career and your network is one of your most valuable assets. Networking is a two-way street, so deliberately and thoughtfully connect and make introductions for others. My best networking experiences have been through leadership positions in professional and non-profit organizations.

Finally, there are a lot of good lawyers out there. Differentiate yourself by taking the time to understand your client's business and by making smart risk/reward decisions.



MARGO WOLF O'DONNELL
Partner, Benesch

We all know that building and maintaining a book of business is the key to success in a law firm. My own experiences have taught me again and again that I need to take full advantage of my own opportunities-- formal and informal networks, staying up to date on developments in my practice area, continually seeking new credentials. These efforts set the stage for success. Providing value to my clients in my work also is critical. At the same time, as law firm attorneys, we must choose every day to take risks, by looking for opportunities and picking up the phone or sending the email to a potential client. Risk-taking operates on a larger scale at particular junctures in a career. Mid-career can be the ideal time to tackle a challenging role on a case or in a firm leadership role. But these kinds of experiences are only available to lawyers willing to leave the safety of the status quo.



MARCIA OWENS
Partner, Honigman LLP

Add value. The practice of law is not a game of Jeopardy—it is not how quick you hit the buzzer, but whether you answer the question in a way that provides the client with something more than they already knew. The value of a lawyer is in thoughtful consideration, analysis, research, preparation and experience. Too often, lawyers try to sell their services by being “fast” or “more up to date” than their (typically older) counterparts. Using these phrases to define yourself may score some quick wins, but it may also cost you the respect of seasoned clients and colleagues who recognize that there is no fast forward button on thoughtful legal counsel. Be humble, listen, ask questions and take a rookie spot on the team—those more senior attorneys may be a little slower, but they have many more laps under their belt.



5. Dress for success.

Take note of your audience, a court appearance or meeting to dress professionally and appropriately for the occasion.

4. Stay Current.

Stay on top of current changes in the law, so you can counsel clients and address topics that are on their mind.

3. Out of Office.

Communicate your plans for vacation or time away, so that others can adjust expectations.

2. Your mother does not work here.

Take responsibility for your legal career. No one else has the same interest in your success as you do.

1. That was easy (or was it).

Hitting send is easy, but think before you send a message. Think about how to send the message, what method to use to convey your message and even when to send your message.

*The Coalition of Women's Initiatives in Law is comprised of law firm and in-house counsel members with chapters in Chicago, New York and Washington D.C. This organization offers programming focused on networking and leadership for the advancement of female attorneys. www.thewomenscoalition.com