



Do the Right Thing

Networking, Mentoring, Business and Leadership Development for the Diverse Attorney

During the New York State Bar Association's 2011 Annual Meeting, the NYSBA Committee on Diversity sponsored a roundtable discussion titled "Do the Right Thing." The panelists shared their thoughts on the challenges and best practices with respect to the crucial skills of networking, mentoring and business and leadership development. What follows is a slightly edited transcript of that discussion.

Panelists

Lillian M. Moy, Executive Director, Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York

I. Javette Hines, Senior Vice President, Supplier Diversity and Sustainability, Citigroup (Citi)

Brenda L. Gill, Vice President, Head of Strategy for Global Accounts, Thomson Reuters Markets

Stacey Schwartz, Diversity Development & Programs Supervisor, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, LLP

Betty Lugo, Partner, Pacheco & Lugo, Attorneys at Law

James P. Chou, Past President, Asian American Bar Association of New York; Senior Counsel, Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP

William Edwards, Attorney, Enforcement Division, U.S. Securities & Exchange Commission

Introduction

Moy: These skills – networking, mentoring, business and leadership development – are so interrelated. Can we really have successful business development without good networking skills? Can we learn leadership skills from our mentors? Can we develop our leadership and business without good mentoring?

Hines: Business development is essential to ongoing success. My focus especially will be on mentoring as an essential ingredient to success. To find the right mentor,

broaden your conception of who and what a mentor can be. Look at various ways to initiate a relationship.

Gill: Owning your own career and brand is key to my offering. Always be aware of your brand. In one word, what would it be?

Schwartz: I spend a lot of time counseling associates on how associates are often branded with the attitude they project. Attitude is so important. You would be surprised at how being positive and cheerful about the work you do will help you get ahead.

Networking

Chou: My focus will be on networking, which is important for our careers. Many of us haven't been taught how to network and have had to learn this later in our careers. In my experience, networking can lead to many business and professional opportunities. You never know where a contact will lead -- your next client, a new mentor, a political appointment, etc.

Lugo: I believe that good networking skills are crucial to business development. In 1992 I founded the first Hispanic women-owned law firm in New York at One World Trade Center. In order to develop our business, both my business partner Carmen A. Pacheco and I drew from our business contacts and networked a great deal. We marketed ourselves and acted as our own publicist. As a result we have developed a brand that is well respected within our community and the legal profession. We attended and spoke at numerous conferences and events that specialized in our areas of practice: Banking, Corporate, Commercial and Insurance Litigation. We conducted free seminars for startup businesses in corporate and government offices, churches, libraries and banks. We assisted many small businesses in connecting with the Wall Street community in terms of joint venture, access to capital and business development.

Moy: Networking – how do you learn what your parents can't teach you?

AABANY [Asian American Bar Association of New York] has a wonderful presentation on how to learn more about networking that is applicable to many different contexts.

Chou: I started out as a typical associate – staying in my office and working all the time. I didn't really begin networking until I came to AABANY at the suggestion of my client – the then-law chair of the Manhattan Democratic Party – who I was working with on the landmark case of *Lopez Torres v. New York State Board of Elections*. He suggested that getting involved in a specialty bar was a good way to develop my career and explore opportunities. He was right – my involvement with AABANY opened a new world for me. I met, befriended and actively developed friendships with colleagues, mentors, and business contacts. Through these experiences, I have come to



Lillian M. Moy

understand that networking is not simply meeting people at a function. It is purposefully developing and cultivating a community of relationships that enrich and enhance both your life and career. It is an endeavor that requires that you have goals and objectives for your networking activities and to be intentional in pursuing those goals. It requires you to understand the message and “brand” that you want to communicate to others.

Good networking takes practice: attending different functions; knowing your “audience.” After getting business cards, follow up by phone or email. Set up a lunch and cultivate the relationship.

Gill: Branding is a huge part of this: what is your message? Personal branding is the creation of a living asset. This includes developing an appearance that is uniquely distinguishable. Develop your best elevator pitch. Start by asking three trusted mentors to describe your unique characteristics. Use this information to help craft a message tailored to your audience – sometimes lawyers, sometimes business contacts. Start by showing your knowledge and tailor your conversation.

Moy: What do we say to people who say that is so phony and insincere?

Gill: It's human. Talk to people like you do your friend – not necessarily about business. I like the color you're wearing. Tell a success story. Someone came up to me after I did a PLI panel and said I would like to talk to you for 15 minutes. She made an appointment. She was on time; she had prepared a few questions.

Schwartz: The 15-minute telephone call – even if you're unemployed. Follow up and make it happen. It feels good to be able to help people. It may feel awkward but remember networking to make a move should be framed



Stacey Schwartz



William Edwards



I. Javette Hines

as a positive thing. I want to chat with you so I can learn more about your practice.

Moy: And what about using social networking?

Edwards: Social networking – I always counsel young lawyers that Facebook is a no-no because of the structure of Facebook. I like LinkedIn as a better tool for professional networking.

Hines: Definitely go with LinkedIn and limit your Facebook usage.

Gill: Do not take the card if you are not going to follow up. You can even use an old fashioned method such as email.

Mentoring

Hines: What is mentoring versus sponsorship?

Gill: Mentoring would often be someone who looks like me: I would talk about my next job. I might talk to them about friendship issues. I do distinguish mentoring from sponsorship. My sponsors have tended to be people who do not look like me. My sponsors were responsible for me getting the role I have at Thomson Reuters, which didn't previously exist. My sponsors knew my reputation and credibility and they would speak up for me when I was not there.

Edwards: Many of my mentors do not look like me and I deliberately looked to substantive experts to develop my own substantive expertise.

Schwartz: Formal mentorship at Skadden lasts three years or longer and your mentor and you have clearly defined roles. In our experience, a formal, tailored program seems to work better so the mentor and mentee understand the expectations, such as how often you will meet. Informal mentoring has been very helpful to me. I look for mentors who have work/life balance, which I seek to achieve, and I try to create relationships with

women who balance work and personal life the way I want to balance it. She might be someone who has not necessarily achieved balance, but who works on it. I also enjoy being a mentor.

Lugo: I was mentored by Justice Irma Vidal Santaella, the first Hispanic woman elected to the Supreme Court, in Bronx County in 1984. I first met her after having received a congratulatory note on my passing the New York State Bar Examination. Judge Santaella wrote a similar letter to all attorneys with a Spanish surname who were on a list in the *New York Law Journal* as having passed the bar and invited them to meet with her. I visited with her in court and she was quite gracious and we became good friends. We started our firm in the World Trade Center at her recommendation as being a safe place for two women to start a firm. She continued to mentor us and invited us to social gatherings at her home where we met members of the judiciary, politicians, dignitaries and community leaders.

We in turn have mentored many young students, associates and businesses. We adopted Public School 274 in Bushwick section of Brooklyn, New York, and awarded scholarships to a group of fifth graders. We also follow their progress and assist them. We hire high school and college interns and mentor them in their interest in the legal field. We also actively mentor law students and young associates. I try to be very hands-on and mentor on the basics such as school, education, work ethic, courtesy, professionalism, respect, how to interact with people, even how to choose a mentor.

Edwards: Most important to me is to have substantive similarities. You might also want a co-racial confidante – someone in your ranks or above. It is very important to have someone to talk to when negative or biased comments come from a client or colleague. But on a day-to-

day basis there will be projects and assignments within your practice group, and it is absolutely essential to navigate with guidance. Knock on a door – be a pest. In New York City, so many lawyers are liberals and they would love to have an attorney of color seek them out. They will bend over backwards for you. Remember, you do have allies in the firm – seek them out as soon as possible.

Hines: How do you move from networking to mentoring?

Chou: Your relationships will develop and evolve differently. Some will be more experienced and ideally situated to mentor and help you navigate your career. There will be some with whom you can be more candid. Others will develop into peers with whom you bounce ideas regarding substantive work. The mentoring relationship will often develop on its own, and informally, but it does often require you to be proactive in seeking out the mentor's time.

Lugo: As a mentor, I'm proactive. I have told law students to get out and network. Always have at least one nice suit and go to different functions and meet people. If you're my mentee and you need clothes, then I will take you shopping for clothes. Mentees have to be able to follow through on their end to take full advantage of a mentoring relationship. Mentees have to have the ability and willingness to be on it – to have a professional appearance, to be accessible when the mentor can provide something valuable. The mentor must also take personal and family issues into consideration and be compassionate but proactive at all times.

Gill: To add, there is a continuum to what mentees should come prepared with. Mentees should be respectful of mentors' time. Prepare an agenda and questions for your mentor to advise on. Mentees can ask me for 15 to 20 minutes of my time but should do some research on my background and experience so that our time together is beneficially utilized.

Schwartz: I have seen how awkward it can be for partners to give candid feedback. Sometimes the partner is not fully satisfied with the work product but is reluctant to give criticism because they are afraid to hurt someone's development. Unfortunately, this is a place where it could be helpful to ameliorate the situation. Instead the partner will say, thanks, I'll take it from here and the associate doesn't know what he means by that. So, a mentee should follow up and ask for feedback that is candid and indicate their full appreciation of such feedback. We're conscious about that in our mentoring program, such as

the importance of candid feedback and we try to help partners and senior associates surface the issues that associates need to work on. They have to get down to the details of the day in terms of what to get done.

Hines: Whether your mentoring relationship is formal or informal, guidance at the beginning is very helpful. Mentees should say to the mentor, feel free to be candid. If it's not working out, let me know.

Chou: I agree that a mentee has to come prepared. We're all very busy, and the mentees must be prepared and conscious of the time demands on all of us. Mentees will often need to be proactive in scheduling time with mentors.

Hines: When does that stop? What if your efforts to schedule time with your mentor are just not working out?

Chou: Everyone is different. There are some that you have to keep following up on before they schedule something simply because they're swamped. There are others where you know that after two or three calls without a response, it's time to move on.

Hines: What about reverse mentoring?

Edwards: I haven't had that experience but I would like to think that I try to give positive reinforcement to mentors for when they mentor their next person.

Gill: Thomson Reuters has a reverse mentoring program that is quite unique. Reverse mentoring is designed to help all participants gain a better understanding of the people who make up our business, share what we learn and make changes where needed. A reverse mentoring relationship involves an employee that is junior to, or of a different race, gender or sexual orientation than, the mentee, and who provides guidance to and shares experiences and insights with the mentee, who in this case is a more senior person. This creates a unique opportunity for

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those at different levels in the organization to share their experiences with Senior Leadership. The purpose is to have candid dialogue about each person's unique set of experience – their perspective. Through the dialogue that typically occurs monthly over a period of six months, the mentee/mentor can discuss topics such as bias, diversity and cultural/regional differences. The reverse mentoring program helps the dominant group recognize that biases are natural, but there are negative outcomes that can arise from subconscious biases of the dominant group. It also helps people understand that some people can be the beneficiary of certain privileges based on how they look, while other people can suffer from negative assumptions based on how they look.

Moy: I don't play golf, tennis or squash. How can I build a book of business?

Edwards: Some suggestions include co-authoring an article, getting your name out there; asking your partner to bring you to meetings with clients. Build substantive expertise and align yourself with a leader.

Hines: Be varied in your expectations. I do own golf clubs but they are rarely used. Substantively, I'm at the top of my game. I'm also a writer and a singer and try to let people get to know me as a person. I believe in doing substantial community outreach and civic activities.

Lugo: I golf and I sing karaoke. Everyone likes to get up and sing after a few drinks. I go to many different community activities and local parades. I try to be very involved in events where I can help others, and I attend many community events to meet people, network and generate business.

Hines: From the community perspective, I work on State Bar issues, with my sorority, and The Links, Incorporated.

In the past, I have also been active with the Association of Black Women Attorneys and the New York Metro Chapter of the National Black MBA Association.

Moy: So, does being a Bar leader lead to business?

Chou: In my experience, yes. Through my Bar involvement, I have gotten to know many in-house and general counsel. So my Bar service has definitely resulted in opportunities and new clients.

Lugo: Yes. You have to be proactive and let others know who you are and your specialty. It also provides you with a local platform for marketing. As former president of the Hispanic National Bar Association Region I, in 1993, and current chair of NYBSA Diversity Committee, I believe that Bar association activities helped me to market myself and my firm and we also began to take on high profile cases relevant to the community.

Moy: We asked the Bar presidents in the room for their thoughts about this: Ken Standard, no; Steve Younger, yes – had my best year; Assad Siddiqi, yes; John Higgins, led to many connections but not money.

Now, how about leveraging our own diversity as minority- or women-owned businesses?

Lugo: As minority- and women-owned businesses, we must seek out opportunities. To date, minority- and women-owned law firms and attorneys are still underrepresented in doing business with government and corporate America. I applaud Governor Paterson for recently passing a new law – the Business Diversification Act of New York. It requires state agencies to give 20% of their contracts to minority- and women-owned business enterprises – MWBEs. We plan to have a future CLE specifically on this act and how access to contracts for legal services with the state can be addressed. For start-



Brenda L. Gill



James P. Chou



Betty Lugo

ers, all minority and women attorneys should make sure they are certified with New York State as opportunities surface, especially for lawyers. This applies to partners and associates of large firms. There can be joint venture agreements so when networking, try to meet firms who want to work with you.

Hines: For example, TARP and the Dodd-Frank Act. There are lots of opportunities for diverse attorneys.

Chou: In recent years, many clients have emphasized diversity and have done the diversity movement a great service. For example, many companies are now emphasizing the importance of having diverse attorneys on the teams that are providing them legal services. Some clients actually scrutinize bills and billing descriptions to confirm that diverse attorneys are working on their matters and are not just showcased at pitches.

Hines: Law firms now have to look at diversity as a business essential through the procurement process.

Leadership and Career Development

Hines: Let's look at leadership and career development – what are the steps you took?

Gill: I'm what's called an "intrapreneur." Intrapreneurship is the act of behaving like an entrepreneur, except within a larger organization. It's an employee initiative to undertake something new, without being asked to do so. According to Wikipedia, "the intrapreneur focuses on innovation and creativity and transforms an idea into a profitable venture, while operating within the organizational environment." I created a value proposition that would help drive efficiencies within a group by harvesting/sharing the collective wisdom of that group. I developed a business and marketing plan and I strategically moved my career forward. I wanted to stay within the company so I re-tooled my career to get the job that I wanted. When I get a job, I'm already thinking of the next job and we all should be doing that.

Edwards: My focus at Wachttell was on white-collar work. I represented the defense side and the FCC noticed me. Six years later during my interview at the SEC, someone said, hey, I noticed you when you were there on the other side. So you never know what connections you make that will later become valuable. Your future is always in the background of what you're doing now.

Hines: How do you advise young associates who are focused on building a practice and developing a leadership tool kit?

Schwartz: Focus on who you are talking to during the networking process. What are the key relationship skills?

Chou: Be proactive. Take on service and leadership roles in the community.

Hines: What about derailment figures to being considered a leader?

Lugo: Have we made any changes? I believe that there are some opportunities for minority and women attorneys but we are still relegated to fighting for a small piece of the pie. Even as the first Hispanic women-owned law firm in New York, it is still difficult to compete for business with the larger firms who have historically received the lucrative work from government and corporate America.

Gill: It starts with owning the room or acting as if we do. Sometimes we have to fake it until we make it and understand the law firm and corporate culture.

Hines: What is the nugget we want to leave the audience with about networking, mentoring and business relationships?

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Hines: Don't check out before you check out. When it was taking more time than I wanted to get to the next level, the answer seemed to be start looking, leave. However, my mentor said wait for the right opportunity and whatever you do, don't check out before you actually "check out."

Edwards: Don't wait too long before you figure out what you want to be.

Gill: It's your career – manage it like a business. Own your success. Do not be defined by society's limitations. The difference between being ordinary and extraordinary is that little "extra."

Schwartz: Know your skills and be able to articulate them. I've always liked the acronym SOAR – Situations, Observe, Action, and get a Result. Keep that in your back pocket.

Chou: Don't just stay in the office all day and then go home. Go out and network and develop relationships. Get involved with Bar associations in your community because it will lead to work.

Lugo: Be positive, kind and responsible. Practice the golden rule. "Do unto others, as you would have others do unto you." We must always thank and appreciate each other and we must always be professional and courteous.

Questions and Answers

Question: As golf is used for bonding and assignments – you may be minimizing its role?

Gill: Maybe you don't play golf, but you have to find some other ways to get time with the right people.

Chou: There's always poker and X-box. The point is that there are other common passions and interests that will naturally lead to relationships.

Lugo: We should play golf.

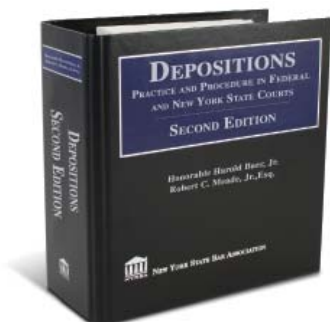
Question: I never thought of asking anyone to be my mentor. Was that a mistake?

Gill: It's a very individualized decision.

Lugo: Do not limit yourself to your own group. Don't limit yourself to the legal field. Explore all opportunities.

Gill: There are lots of places in business or elsewhere. ■

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