

# The prudential

## IN THE HIGHLY COMPETITIVE LEGAL WORLD, HOW CAN

**With Australia's legal recruitment environment tightening in an era of increasing firm mergers and government hiring freezes, it is becoming more difficult than ever for law graduates to find legal work. But developing skills in networking and marketing could see you distinguish yourself from other candidates and on track for career gold.**

### Start early

#### *Research and interact*

While you are still studying, start researching the area of law or type of organisation that interests you. Speak with lecturers and practising professionals to find out who the market leaders are in the area. Careers fairs such as the LIV Legal Careers Fair ([www.liv.asn.au/careersfair](http://www.liv.asn.au/careersfair)) are a great opportunity for this. Make sure to follow up with any interesting people you meet at these events. Maybe arrange to have coffee with that graduate you met at the Careers Fair to inquire further about how they landed in their position and ask for some tips.

### Practise practical skills

You may also wish to develop some practical skills in your chosen area early on. Say you would like to practise as a barrister in international human rights law, then make sure you actively participate in your university debating or mooted competitions. If you think academia is more your style apply to undertake an honours thesis and develop a strong relationship with your supervisor. Often university professors require research assistants and establishing good connections with your teachers may bring you to their attention when they are considering

their next appointment. Developing and maintaining good relations with your lecturers may provide some good academic references that are looked upon favourably in the job market.

### Job hunting

#### *Applying for advertised roles*

The number one tip when looking for work is to be proactive. When applying for an advertised role, call the human resources manager or person listed as the contact for the position and inquire about the role, the organisation, the relevant department and the person to whom you would be reporting. This makes you seem proactive, demonstrates your interest in the role and provides you with an early opportunity to demonstrate your communication skills, thus distinguishing you from the other candidates also vying for the same position. Often, the HR person will note down your name and will be able to recognise your email or application. This initial conversation breaks the ice and makes for a great introduction in your covering letter. Referring to your earlier conversation with the interviewer helps establish an instant rapport or connection with him/her before even obtaining an interview for the role.

#### *Use your existing networks*

If you are having no luck with advertised roles, ask your friends and colleagues from organisations where you volunteered or worked or your lecturers to see if they know of any suitable positions that are available. Sometimes organisations are not actively searching for candidates but are happy to consider someone who has the skills required to fill a gap in their organisation. Utilising your existing networks can be a good way of finding out about these unadvertised opportunities.



# network

## NETWORKING AND MARKETING FURTHER YOUR CAREER?



### **Establish new connections**

Once you have exhausted your existing networks, it's time to make some new ones. You should consider joining the LIV, Victorian Women Lawyers, Asian Australian Lawyers' Association or any other group you feel passionately about and ask to become a committee member. This will allow you to meet regularly with people who share similar interests and will help you in developing your interpersonal skills. Who knows, you may meet someone who ends up recommending you for a role in their organisation.

Try to attend as many social functions or seminars held by the organisations you join as you can – the LIV has a full calendar of events and activities each year ([www.liv.asn.au/Professional-Development/whatsOn-Calendar.aspx](http://www.liv.asn.au/Professional-Development/whatsOn-Calendar.aspx)). It is always best to see the guest list beforehand so you can make a list of the top three people you would like to speak with at the event. After arrival, don't get distracted by all the fancy food and alcohol. Remember, you're there to mingle. Try to spend at least a few minutes chatting to each of your top-listed people. Prepare some relevant and thought-provoking questions beforehand. If it feels natural, ask for their business card but remember it's about the quality of the connections you make and not necessarily the number of cards you collect. After the event, make sure to contact and follow up with the people you met. Maybe send them a LinkedIn invite or email them asking to catch up for coffee.

### **Networking post employment**

#### **Continue to be proactive**

Often a trap that young lawyers fall into once they join an organisation is to become complacent about their career: I have a job now so why worry? It is dangerous to assume

perennial stability in any role. You never know when you will need a career change and the relationships and soft skills that you continue to develop can be invaluable in helping with your next career step.

#### **Mingle with the masses**

Once you begin working, take this opportunity to get to know your colleagues well, especially those in other departments or areas who you do not get to interact with daily. You could consider joining your organisation's social committee or even something as simple as regularly attending Friday night drinks, CPD seminars and internal training sessions.

#### **Celebrate your achievements**

Having a presence within your organisation keeps you at the forefront of the minds of your supervisors, especially when it comes time to seek a promotion or pay rise. Most law firms require that a partner recommends a solicitor for promotion and non-commercial entities are often the same. Therefore, when you make a significant accomplishment, do not be afraid to make your achievement known within your organisation by asking that a notice be put on the internal bulletin or intranet about your accomplishment, or if you have a profile on your organisation's website, that your profile be updated to reflect that achievement. Achievements such as being published in a scholarly journal or being appointed to a leadership position within a not-for-profit organisation, whilst strictly being outside the scope of your work, nonetheless show that you have characteristics such as assertiveness, leadership, communication and organisational skills, which are valued in your workplace.

Networking and marketing are life-long skills that you should continue to cultivate, evolve and develop throughout your career. Remember, no matter what stage of your career you are at, it is always up to you to be your own best advocate. ■

**JING ZHU** is a solicitor at Russell Kennedy and a member of the YLS Editorial and Law Reform Committees.