

Supporting success

Marianne M. Trost,
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on creating
a support
network.

CREATING A STRONGER PROFESSIONAL support network is one way to take greater control of your career. Surrounding yourself with people who can provide guidance, inspiration and encouragement is key to weathering not only the ups and downs of the legal profession but also to achieving your specific career goals.

To strengthen your support network, first assess the support you currently have and the type of support you need. Consider ways in which to add depth and breadth to your network that will help you accomplish your goals. Be specific. Do you need help acquiring more skills, making new contacts, staying focused on your goals, achieving better work/life balance, navigating internal politics, making career path choices, or overcoming adversity?

Once you know what you are looking for, it is much easier to identify people who can provide you with the support you need. One strong mentor relationship can prove to be invaluable in a career; a combination of relationships can provide access to different types of support that fill different needs.

Formal mentors: If you currently participate in a mentoring programme, make certain you are maximising the opportunity. If your mentor is busy, don't wait too long before taking the initiative to suggest a time to get together. Be proactive in seeking the guidance, experience and wisdom that a mentor can offer.

Informal mentors: If you don't have a mentor, but have identified someone you trust, ask them whether they would be willing to spend time with you sharing their experiences and offering guidance. If they are unable to assist, do not take it personally. Ask another. Finding the right fit sometimes takes more than one attempt. Informal mentoring relationships and professional friendships can be very helpful, inspirational, and last a lifetime.

Lawyer colleagues: Be conscious of whether your relationships with colleagues encourage you to reach your full potential, or whether they distract you and cause you to

focus on the negatives. Seek out colleagues that bring out the best in you and push you. Spend more time with those who are role modeling the success you want to achieve.

Non-lawyer women professionals:

Consider expanding your circle of support to include women in other professions. Their accomplishments can be inspirational and affirming. Their experiences can provide new insights and a fresh perspective.

Not-for-profit organisation professionals and volunteers: Broadening your support network to include one or more people who have made a commitment to improving their community and the lives of others can be highly inspirational. Such relationships expand your interests, and provide a refreshing change of pace and an opportunity to view your own challenges in a different light.

Working mother professionals: Consider finding other working mother professionals. Many women bar associations and women's organisations have mother groups, where common experiences on childcare, ideas for afterschool activities and other resources are shared.

Those who precede you: Include someone who has achieved what you would like to achieve, for example equity partnership or top rainmaker recognition. Such relationships can give you an opportunity to glean what it takes to achieve your goal and to learn from others. When putting together your support network, remember to consider what you can bring to the relationship. Ask the people in your network how you can assist them. As these relationships evolve naturally, you will find that your network of support will provide you with the resources you need to navigate through turbulent times and position your career for success in whatever way you choose to define it. WOMENLEGAL

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