

Book Reviews:

Networking Connections and the Etiquette Edge: Two Guides to Business Success

by William A. Chamberlain

***The Etiquette Edge: The Unspoken Rules for Business Success* by Beverly Langford (American Management Association, 2005).**

***Building Career Connections: Networking Tools for Law Students and New Lawyers* by Donna Gerson (NALP, 2007).**

Educating law students and lawyers about professionalism, as a recent *NALP Bulletin* article by Susan Gainen of the University of Minnesota attests, has come to permeate all we do as career professionals. At the core of what it means to be a professional is the ability to create and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with professionals and other coworkers. Two large topics, both of which have been written about innumerable times, but which must be mastered if one considers oneself a professional, are the related arts of etiquette and networking.

Classics by various experts in these areas abound: Letitia Baldrige (*Everyday Business Etiquette*) for etiquette and Susan RoAne (*How to Work a Room*) for networking to name just two of the more well-known and well-respected practitioners.

Writing books on these topics is a tough job. In terms of etiquette, criticism from the lay public can come in a variety of forms: "It's just common sense." "I would never do *that*!" Most professionals do seem to know many of the basic rules: solids on the left, liquids on the right, firm handshake, eye contact, cubicle etiquette, e-mail etiquette, workplace etiquette. It all seems obvi-

ous. Isn't it really all about the Golden Rule? Yet we all can provide examples of the failure to observe basic commonsense rules. And certainly no one wants to read a book about etiquette!

Likewise, law students and lawyers alike shy away from books (and programs) on networking. Despite every author's valiant attempt to get their readers to discard visions of either being shunned at an event where one knows no one or being viewed as the sleazy business card grabber at the reception, such images still infect the word "networking" with inaccurate connotations. Neither etiquette nor networking, properly done, involves attempts to manipulate people.

Two new books that go a good way toward dispelling these negative perceptions of etiquette and networking are Beverly Langford's *The Etiquette Edge: The Unspoken Rules for Business Success* (American Management Association, 2005) and Donna Gerson's *Building Career Connections: Networking Tools for Law Students and New Lawyers* (NALP, 2007). Both recognize the fundamental truths that networking and etiquette are not merely sets of rules but guides in creating positive professional relationships in a fast-paced online-oriented world.

Beverly Langford, in her book *The Etiquette Edge*, acknowledges that the pace of contemporary worklife puts pressure on everyone's ability to be thoughtful and gracious. Langford's approach is not to dwell on rules but rather on improving communication in the workplace and between business people and clients in both the

domestic and international spheres. In her view, etiquette is merely a tool to help us put our best foot forward and to assist with the accomplishment of mutual goals. Langford's main strength is her focus on how to get along and succeed in the corporate workplace. In her hands, etiquette comes off as relevant and immediately applicable. For example, why not refuse to meet rudeness with rudeness as so many of us fail to do? Hers is a big picture approach.

By contrast, another popular book on etiquette not fully reviewed here — Ann Marie Sabath's *Business Etiquette: 101 Ways to Conduct Business with Charm & Savvy* (Career Press, 2002), now in its second edition — is a more rule-based, "micro" approach to many of the same issues arranged in 116 numbered "Tips." Unlike Langford's, Sabath's rules are clearly delineated rather than "unspoken." Her suggestions on getting out from under clutter were particularly helpful to me. Her section on international etiquette contains a short section explaining the differing etiquette rules for each of several countries. Sabath's book is arranged as more of a list of "do's" and "don't's." Both Langford's and Sabath's books indicate how far we have come from the stereotypes of etiquette (how does one use that fish knife?) to what in a broader sense has become a key aspect of "professionalism."

While both Langford and Sabath cover some networking basics, for example, how to meet people at an event where you know no one (and, more importantly, how to gracefully disengage!), Donna Gerson, in *Building Career Connections*, focuses exclusively on this aspect of being a professional. Gerson also uses the "e-word" in various chapters. As her title suggests, her book is about building and maintaining professional relationships. And this is really Sabath's and Langford's goal as well.

Gerson, the author of a previous widely used book on working for a small firm (*Choosing Small, Choosing Smart*, NALP), breaks networking down into the goals and the tactics involved. Her book is a gem. It is practical and readable. She distills the conventional wisdom about networking in a concise form that can be read quickly by busy law students and attorneys. Unlike Sabath and

Langford, who focus on the business world more generally, Gerson focuses on law, and law students and new lawyers specifically. Her book is peppered with encouraging quotes from folks like Winston Churchill and Robert Frost. She also includes sidebars entitled "In Their Own Words . . .," where attorneys, law students, and career professionals comment in a personal vein on the particular benefits of networking. One gets the sense that Gerson has read voluminously in the area of networking and is giving the reader the best of the best.

Her book is organized in six chapters (and she manages to cover the topic extensively in just under 100 pages!): "What Is Networking?"; "How Do I Network?"; "Socializing and Networking" (the interface between etiquette and networking); "Informational Interviewing"; "Networking for Business Development"; and "Networking and the Nontraditional Legal Career." In Gerson's view, networking is a means of gathering and sharing information.

She breaks in the novice networker by providing step-by-step instructions on how to meet people at a reception — the SAID method (survey, approach, introduce, and depart) — and urges readers not to forget the three S's of conversation (smile, shake, and salutation). Gerson even provides sample thank you notes and "approach" letters for use in obtaining informational interviews — and her take on the benefits of taking up golf may come as a surprise. While Susan RoAne's work is still the best (and most humorous) basic text on networking (*How to Work a Room*, HarperCollins, 2000), Donna Gerson's new book is essential for law students and new lawyers.

The goal of the best writing on etiquette and networking is to help us make our working lives easier. No one can succeed professionally without being savvy about these topics. We can measure our success as professionals by our ability to work positively with others. In E. M. Forster's words, in an increasingly impersonal and self-absorbed world, to be successful and happy, one must "only connect." And much of this connection happens in small ways: we should take the time, at least every

once in a while, to forgo e-mail and send that hand-written thank you note.

Note: The Etiquette Edge: The Unspoken Rules for Business Success by Beverly Langford (American Management Association, 2005) and Building Career Connections: Networking Tools for Law Students and New Lawyers by Donna Gerson (NALP, January 2007) can be ordered through the online bookstore at www.nalp.org or by using the publication order form enclosed with this Bulletin. Discounts are available for bulk orders of Donna Gerson's Building Career Connections. Members interested in arranging for Donna Gerson to make a presentation based on this book may contact her at donna@donnagerson.com.

The other etiquette book mentioned in this review — Business Etiquette: 101 Ways to Conduct Business with Charm & Savvy by Ann Marie Sabath (Career Press, 2002) can be ordered from its publisher or through your favorite online bookseller or bookstore.

William A. Chamberlain is Assistant Dean, Career Strategy & Advancement, for Northwestern University School of Law. He is a member of the NALP Publications Advisory Group, on whose behalf these reviews were written.