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Navigating Your Organization

by 2012 Fellows Demetra Liggins and Anthony Gay

How do you identify and connect with people who will bring you more complex work or who have greater power within your organization?

DL: To identify people who can help you get more complex work, check new matter reports, find out who is the relationship attorney for the top client of the firm, and review the firm's committee list at the beginning of each year.

Once you identify the right people to connect with, try chatting with them about new matters, sending them an article about their client, or finding other common ground.

AG: Whether you are in a law firm, serve as in-house counsel, or are in a business role—and I have been fortunate to be able to experience all three—the best way to connect with others who can help you advance is to become known as the “go to” person. Be the “go to” person for providing great, well-thought out, well-written work product. Be the “go to” person for solutions to complex matters, especially those with short deadlines or those that come in on Friday nights and weekends. Be the “go to” person for not just doing work, but doing work that solves the problem or issue presented. If you do this, senior leaders in your organization and your peers will identify you as a “go to” person for their important work, teams, and clients.

How do you explore a different practice area or other roles within your organization?

DL: Determine which practice areas already work together or are complementary with your practice group and start there.

AG: First, network within your organization. If there are firm or business cocktail hours, company outings, or sponsored external events, make sure you get out of your comfort group of people and socialize with those in other areas of the practice or business. It's unlikely you will get an opportunity outside what is perceived to be your “normal” role if someone doesn't know you and have a positive image of you.

Second, ask. You have to let people know you are interested in what they do. Ask to work with partners or business units outside of your expertise. You may not get an opportunity

immediately, but check in with the partner or business unit lead from time to time. Everyone, at some point, has a need for additional resources.

Finally, you have to continue to excel in your normal responsibilities. If you are going to broaden your network, plan to broaden your bandwidth for producing great work.

How do you explore a different practice area or other roles within your organization?

AG: You need to have three or four people who have you as a part of their workflow network. That helps make sure you have a steady stream of work, even when one partner or senior associate may not have work to give you. As you get to know these people, and do great work for them, they can also become sponsors and advocates for you within and outside the firm.

More broadly, my advice, whether you are a young associate or someone who is well into their legal or business career, is that you should always be looking for your next opportunity. That could be within or outside of your organization, but you always need to be doing that so *you* are driving your career, not other people.

2012 Fellow **Demetra Liggins** is a Partner at Thompson & Knight LLP, specializing in business finance and restructuring for a variety of large and small public and private companies. She is also a member of the Women's Business Alliance of the Greater Houston Partnership and a Fellow of the Houston Young Lawyers Foundation. Demetra and her twin sister founded Corporate Homie, an organization that seeks to help women and minorities advance in corporate America through one-on-one consultations, public speaking, and a weekly podcast.

2012 Fellow **Anthony Gay** is Vice President, Governmental and External Affairs, at PECO Energy, an Exelon company, where he oversees PECO's state and regional governmental and external stakeholder outreach, and PECO's Energy and Marketing Services group, which includes Large Customer Services. He was previously PECO's Associate General Counsel. Prior to joining Exelon, Tony was Assistant General Counsel for Verizon Communications Inc. in Philadelphia. Tony is also a member of the Board of Directors of Steppingstone Scholars a private organization dedicated to helping educationally underserved students achieve admission to, and success at top schools through a program of academics, mentoring, and support.