

Book Review: **THE OPPORTUNITY MAKER**

BY LENNART E. RODEN

Ari Kaplan's new book has a long title: *The Opportunity Maker – Strategies for Inspiring Your Legal Career Through Creative Networking and Business Development*. But as you read his work, you can see why it is so named. Throughout you will find valuable insight and real-life examples of how people developed their skill of self-promotion and, ultimately, business development.

Kaplan's book is written for the law student and lawyer alike – for anyone who someday will be faced with building his or her own practice, whether in a law firm or as a solo practitioner. Kaplan's ideas on relationship building and innovative networking give value to this book and some would say make it a must read.

We all understand that technical skill is a requirement for any good lawyer. But what distinguishes a good lawyer from a great one? How do you start a legal career and set yourself apart from the thousands of other new lawyers each year? Kaplan offers answers, and he does so by example. In *The Opportunity Maker*, there are at least 100 quotes from lawyers, law school career service professionals, HR professionals, businessmen and women, entrepreneurs, and others. Their real-world examples bring a sense of believability to the book.

Kaplan guides the reader through the steps of learning how to network and explores some of the foundations of a successful networker. For example, to be credible and able to promote yourself as a lawyer, you must write well and write often. By design, this normally occurs in law school, perhaps on law review or maybe

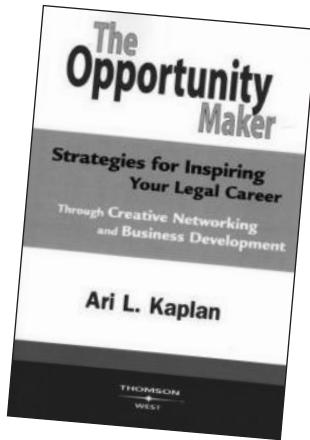
another law school publication. But Kaplan encourages the opportunity seeker to find all kinds of publications (especially on topics where one has excelled) and offer to produce articles for free. Another idea is to start up a new publication or even a start a legal blog.

Networking is about building relationships at every level. From law school to work, from trade organizations to interest groups, you build relationships with the people you interact with. "While much of the success in the law is about academic performance, more of it is about interactive excellence," writes Kaplan.

And he offers many examples of how to achieve interactive excellence. Join a group, a panel, or a book club – or, better yet, start a group, a panel, or a book club. Think about what you know well and create a blog or a podcast on the topic. Find public speaking opportunities. Take a leadership position. Become a community leader; be active.

Kaplan illustrates ways to become an effective communicator, from how to make conversation to ways to overcome social anxiety. The message is clear: it is possible to become a successful networker, even if you are a novice, if you understand how to find opportunities and capitalize on them; if you are creative in your approach to meeting and engaging people; and if you can find even simple ways to set yourself apart from the crowd. One good example of this would be to send everyone on your contact list a happy birthday e-mail.

Kaplan encourages readers to use technology as a big part of their networking plans. He tells the reader how to use electronic calendaring systems and Internet blogs to reach contacts old and new, and he devotes a number of pages to blogging and how to use it efficiently and



successfully for self-promotion. (Note: It is equally possible to blog or use Facebook, YouTube, or MySpace unsuccessfully in self promotion. Just remember that those telling party pictures will keep on telling long after the party is over. That is, be mindful of what you post.)

Kaplan's writing style is succinct, and his technique of including breakout sidebars gives the reader quick access to a summary of his chapter points. Think of them as flash cards for future reference. He also effectively outlines the characteristics of successful self promoters. "They are bold, they act, not react, they envision, not just see."

He literally tells the reader to get up and get out. This profession is not a spectator sport – unless by being a spectator you mean watching a seasoned networker at work, or better yet a mentor. According to Kaplan, a big key to learning the craft is to find a mentor and learn how he or she operates. Watch what they do and how they do it. Learn from them and ask and learn from the mistakes they made. In all likelihood those mentors once had a mentor themselves and will be more than willing to give back.

Kaplan's book is more than a self-help pep talk. He quotes many successful people (many of whom you may even know) and gives the reader insight on how they navigated their careers to become successful in networking and business development. He instructs the reader to invest in the long term. "Law school takes three years, learning the ropes takes a lifetime," writes Kaplan.

The Opportunity Maker is a book that delivers on its promise, as long you are willing to invest in yourself.

Note: The Opportunity Maker can be ordered using the order form enclosed with this Bulletin or from the online Bookstore at www.nalp.org.

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