## 25 Tips to Prepare for Your Next Conference (Part 1 of 2)

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Conference season is in full swing. Whether you are a seasoned networker and attendee, or you are new to the conference circuit, you can take these actionable steps to make the most of your attendance at an industry event or a bar association meeting.

Start with the attendees at the conference. Consider the categories of the people you will meet: current contacts, speakers, prospective clients, lapsed clients, former colleagues, former opposing counsel, etc. Plan to contact some of them in advance and, of course, how you will follow up with them when you return to your office.

#### Before the Conference

1. When you are a member of the host organization, peruse the [membership directory](https://bit.ly/3ftL9hG) to identify the people who align with your practice or are potential referral sources. Locate members who are in your city or state. Dash off an email to say you look forward to meeting them. Perhaps mention that you will wear a distinctive article of clothing: a green tie or a burgundy pocket square for men, and a red or patterned blazer for women. Make it easy for them to find you in the crowded gathering.

2. Bring a stack of [business cards](https://bit.ly/2p3fdqb). You’re naked without them.

3. If your firm has a *small branded item*, bring a supply to give away. Everyone can use a pen with your law firm’s name on it. I created a business-card-sized list of tips for an interview with a reporter that also includes my contact details and website URL.

4. Contact the speakers of most interest and indicate your eagerness to hear their presentation. Offer to ask a question at their session.

5. Rehearse your [elevator pitches](https://bit.ly/32KCcWN): one for attorneys and one for general audiences.

6. Make your reservation at the conference hotel. You may run into other attendees in the lobby or at the restaurant, by design or coincidence. Plus, you can easily decompress from information overload with a quick exit to your room upstairs.

7. Remember to set an auto-reply on your email that you are attending a conference and all urgent questions should be directed to a colleague. You will respond to any pending questions late in the day.

#### During the Conference

1. Silence your cellphone.
2. ***At the breakfast***, sit at a table with attendees you already know; learn what’s new in their practice or business, so you can catch up.
3. During the breaks between sessions, do not peek at your email. Speak to the person next to you in an [informal networking conversation](https://plus.pli.edu/Details/Details?rows=10&sort=score%20desc,s_date%20desc&fq=f_year~3A285B~2018~20~TO~202A5D29~,~2B~f_entity_type~3A2822~Course~20~Handbooks~222022~Treatises~222022~Answer~20~Books~222022~Journals~222022~Insights~2229~,~2B~id~3A282B22~321454-ATL9~2229~&qt=legal_boolean&q=*:*&q1=(au%3DJanet%20Falk)).
4. Take notes at the sessions and think about two action-oriented steps for your practice.
5. ***At the lunch***, introduce yourself to some new contacts, so you can expand your network.
6. Keep track of your conversations with other attendees with notes on *their* business cards, namely, what you discussed and whatever you promised to send them: an introduction to a contact, an article, a podcast and so on. If you did not collect their business card, write a note on one of yours for a follow-up email or call.
7. If there is a discussion in a breakout group, [volunteer to lead it](https://bit.ly/2m0xfb4) and report back to the main gathering. Everyone will hear what you have to say when you stand up and address the assembled attendees.
8. At the conference networking session, in addition to your usual questions, ask the other attendees about the various panels and sessions. Find out what they have learned so far and the action steps they will take.
9. Use your cellphone to snap some selfies with other attendees and in small groups. Now you have a reason to reach out to the people in the photograph; this is one of the tips for follow-up activity after the conference, to be explored further in Part 2.

Some of these activities are familiar; others may be new and represent a fresh way to engage with the attendees and the speakers. Prepare to implement a few, many or all of these tips. You will maximize your attendance at your next conference and may also apply these practices to networking events.

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