

Network Today, Prosper Tomorrow

An Interview with Walt Karnstein

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Paddy's, the scene of Walt Karnstein's first MBA YLS event in 1991, is where we currently sit sipping some of Portland's finest craft ales and talking about the importance of getting involved. Walt's story is one of a naturally shy man who recognized the power and importance of putting himself out there, and did just that, becoming a long-term leader and visionary for the MBA and the ABA.

Currently in-house counsel for Hewlett Packard, Walt recognized early on that building the career he hoped for would require not only hard work, but also learning how to market himself and build professional contacts. A self-proclaimed introvert, he knew he would have to "learn to communicate or die," and learn to communicate he did. After studying abroad in Germany, (without knowing a word of German), Walt graduated from Northwestern University a *different person, a person ready to build the relationships it would take to fulfill his goals. Well-seasoned after his time in Europe and ready for his next adventure,* Walt applied to Willamette Law School, heeding the timeless call of the Wild West and ready to start a new chapter in Oregon.

After law school, Walt turned down offers in many of America's top cities to remain in his adopted home, taking a position with Kolisch Hartwell, where he would remain for the

next 20 years. It didn't take him long to recognize the importance of self-marketing in the legal profession. He attended his first MBA YLS meeting in 1991, less than a year after graduating from law school, and from then on his commitment to the organization was unwavering. In 1992, Walt joined the YLS Board, resulting in an opportunity to attend an ABA meeting the following year. He was immediately hooked, sharing ideas, meeting new people, making contacts on a national level. The once-shy guy became a regular at ABA meetings. It wasn't long before his commitments had expanded and he was chairing the New Lawyers Division of the OSB.

Through his various leadership roles, Walt attended a national meeting regarding the future of the practice of law. It was attended by law firm leaders, many of whom encouraged Walt to set his sights on a similar position within his own firm. Walt did just that, and soon took management responsibility for the finances of his firm. Sticking with what had worked in the past, Walt joined the Law Practice Management (LPM) section of the ABA. He became chair of the LPM section in 2008, and after serving as LPM Chair, took on the role of LPM Finance Officer, which he has held for the past five years. In 2009, Walt, who was a partner at Kolisch Hartwell, came face-to-face with one of the greatest challenges of

law firm management. A lack of work due to the recession meant that his firm would have to retract in size, so he had to have hard conversations with many at his firm. While he otherwise loved the management role, he found that aspect to be quite stressful and began to consider his next move.

Walt made the move in-house, joining Hewlett Packard. He quickly found ample opportunities for leadership and management, while enjoying opportunities to travel and work with people all over the world. His experiences and the skills he had developed in his various roles with the ABA, OSB, and MBA made him ideally suited to building the lasting relationships HP desired. Walt describes HP as a meritocracy, with clear, measurable goals and less conflict than practicing in a firm setting.

Walt's work with the ABA has taken him to 40 states, and on his own time he has managed to check off the other 10. When asked for his advice for young lawyers, he said, "have a plan for your entire career ... and then be willing to change it based on circumstances." A combination of flexibility, vision, and a steady emphasis on building and maintaining networks has helped Walt reach his goals. He credits the bar with providing ample opportunity to build a network for the future, not just tomorrow, and he remains open to what's yet to come.

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