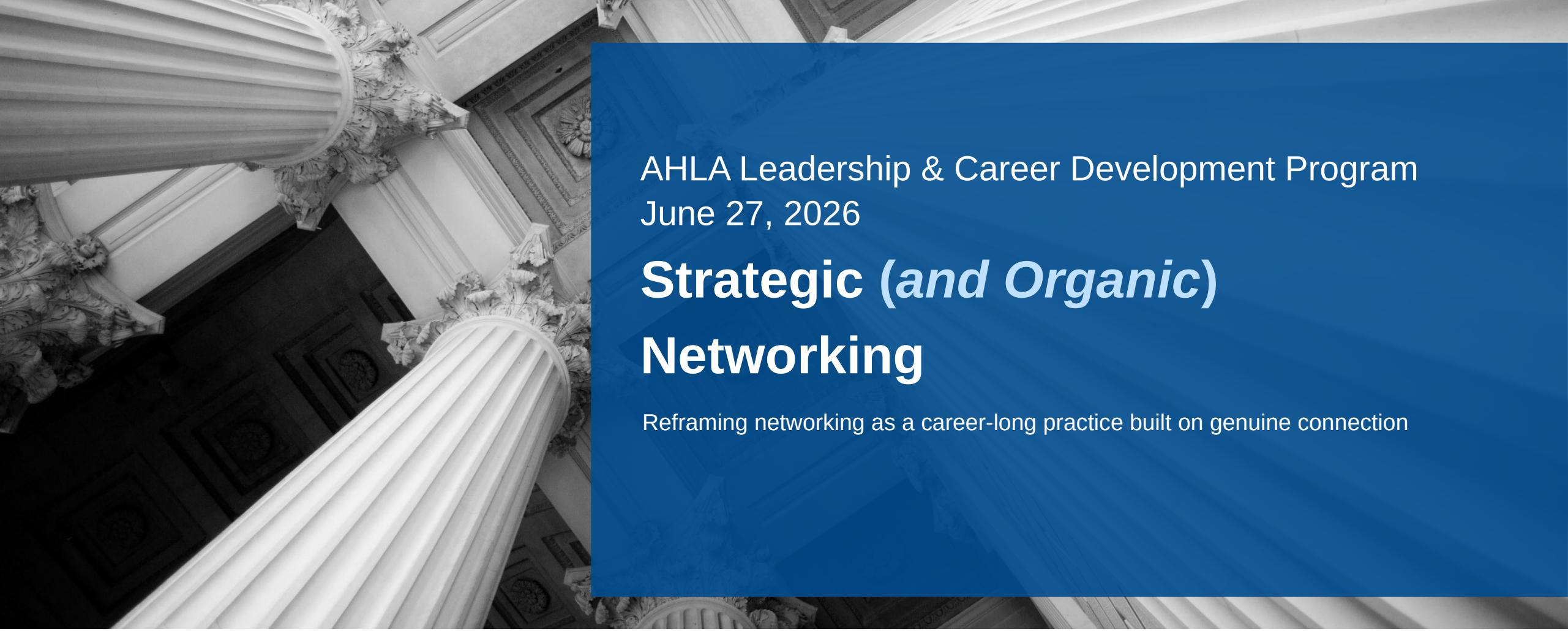




AHLA Leadership & Career Development Program
June 27, 2026

Strategic (*and Organic*) Networking

Reframing networking as a career-long practice built on genuine connection

Two vantage points, one conversation

We've each built a professional community from a different seat. We will share from these vantage points.



Avery Schumacher

Epstein Becker & Green PC
Member of the Firm

The outside-counsel view: building relationships internally, across clients, firms, and professional organization; your network is also your book of business.



Mara Smith

Bristol Myers Squibb
Senior Counsel, Regulatory

The in-house view: building influence inside an organization and a trusted bench of outside advisors and peers across the industry.

Networking is not a transaction.

*It's a career-long **practice**.*

The most durable professional relationships aren't manufactured at a single event. They develop naturally over time, through shared work, genuine curiosity, and consistent presence.

The goal today isn't a better elevator pitch. It's to create a framework for working, connecting, and showing up that quietly compounds across a career.



**Plant it early.
Tend to it often.**

*Organic relationships grow slowly,
then all at once.*

How durable relationships grow



Shared work

The strongest ties form in the doing: projects, deals, committees, problems solved together.



Genuine curiosity

Interest in people as people, not as opportunities. Ask, listen, remember. Curiosity is a catalyst for real connection.



Consistent presence

Showing up, repeatedly, in small ways. Reliability over time is what turns an acquaintance into a relationship.

Two ideas to carry through today



Everyone is different

There is no single right way to network. Personality, role, and career stage all shape what works. Copying a method that isn't you requires more energy and is harder to maintain.



Be genuine

Start from what you enjoy. The version of networking you'll keep doing is the one that feels like you.

What do you like?! That is what will work.

Three circles of connection

01



Inside the workplace

Internal networking – the people you already work alongside.

02



Within AHLA

Your professional association – a community built around your field.

03



Out in the field

Other external networking – clients, peers, alumni, online, and beyond.

For each circle: how it's changed over our careers → how we've actually used it → what to try.

01

Inside the workplace

Internal networking – the relationships you build with the people you already work alongside, day to day.

Internal networking: how it's changed

THEN

- Proximity by default: hallways, shared offices, lunches
- Relationships formed passively, just by being there
- Face time was automatic; visibility came for free

NOW

- Hybrid & remote work make presence a deliberate choice
- Fewer accidental encounters; you must create them
- Cross-office and cross-function ties are expected, but take real intent



The shift: connection used to happen *TO* you. Now you have to choose it, which means the people who reach out stand out more than ever.

Ways we've leaned on our internal networks



Learning the unwritten rules

Mentors and peers who explain how things work, beyond the handbook.



Sponsorship & good work

Being top-of-mind when the interesting matters get staffed and credit gets assigned.



Cross-functional problem-solving

Knowing who to call across the org; essential in-house, valuable everywhere.



Navigating transitions

The colleagues who become references, sponsors, **and lifelong friends.**

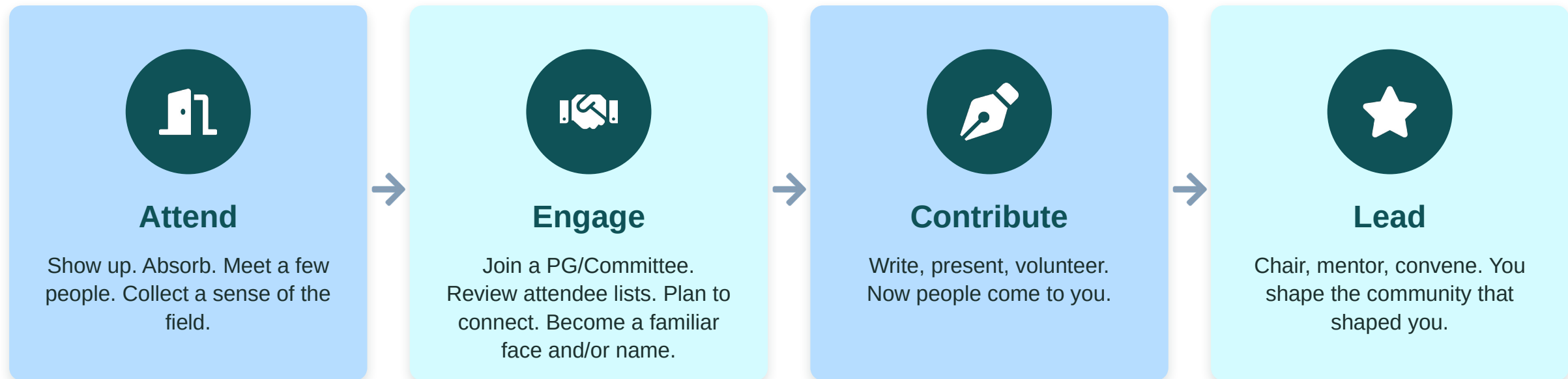
02

Within AHLA

Your professional association – a ready-made community organized around the work that you do.

AHLA networking: how it's changed

Our relationship with AHLA deepened as we moved from consuming the community to building it.



The insight: active participation builds relationships that simply attending, or transactional networking, never can.

Ways we've used the AHLA community



Practice groups & committees

Repeated contact around shared substance; a natural way to build real ties.



Speaking & writing

Visibility that does the introducing for you, even after the session ends.



Referrals & second opinions

A trusted bench to call when a question is outside your lane.



Career moves

Opportunities travel through association ties. AHLA connections can serve as valuable sounding boards.

03

Out in the field

Everyone else – clients, opposing counsel, law school and alumni ties, social circles, and your online presence.

External networking: how it's changed

THEN

- Business cards, conferences, email introductions
- Reputation traveled slowly, by word of mouth
- A few high-effort, in-person touchpoints a year

NOW

- LinkedIn & a visible online presence precede you
- Relationships can build asynchronously, at a distance
- More channels; signal and sincerity arguably matter more



The shift: *the tools multiplied, but the differentiator didn't change. In a louder world, being genuine is what cuts through.*

Ways we've used our broader networks



Business & client development

Work follows trust, and trust follows relationships built before the pitch.



Moving firm ↔ in-house

The two-way street between us is paved with people we already knew.



Reading the market

Comp, trends, what's normal; your network is your benchmark.



Friendship & support

The people who simply get the work, on the hard days and the good ones.

There's no single right way

Effective relationship-building looks different for everyone, and it should evolve as your role, goals, and community change.



By style

- Rooms energize you? Work the events. Drained by them? Go 1:1.
- Better in writing than in person? Let the writing carry you.
- Pick a channel that fits you and do it well.



By stage

- Early: show up, absorb, be useful, follow up.
- Mid: contribute, connect others, deepen a few ties.
- Senior: sponsor, convene, give the lift you once got.

Invest intentionally, without sacrificing the authenticity that makes the relationship worth having.

Practical tips to take with you



Start from what you enjoy: Sustainability is strategy. The habit you keep wins. Faking it is exhausting.



Be useful first: Try to give before you ask. Generosity is a great opener.



Show up consistently: Small, repeatable touches often beat grand gestures.



Go deep: A few real relationships can outperform a big rolodex.



Engage and/or contribute, don't just attend: Write, speak, volunteer; then let people come to you.



Act like a human: Share the good and the bad (if comfortable); vulnerability facilitates connection.



Keep a light system: A simple list and a reason to reconnect goes a long way.



Let it evolve: Your approach should change as you do.

THANK YOU

Let's keep the conversation going

The best time to start building your network is before you need it. The second-best time is right now, starting with the person next to you.

Find us afterward — and connect with us on LinkedIn.

Avery Schumacher Epstein Becker & Green PC · Member of the Firm

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