

The idea for this column came from a conversation I had with a lawyer who I will refer to as Sharon (because I don't know if she wants me to use her real name), in the Denver International Airport after the Annual Meeting. We happened to sit next to each other at a restaurant and talked for more than two hours. One of the topics that we discussed was the

and don't participate. But if the topic is of interest, the meeting is already on your calendar, making it easier to participate. These calls also give you an opportunity to hear from other SLD lawyers and network with them.

Attend chapter meetings or seminars: ACC local chapters hold all kinds of meetings and seminars. Our sponsors offer events that cover a robust set of topics — take advantage of that information and expertise.


One of the

issues Sharon raised was that she is in the suburbs of Chicago, and all of the Chicago Chapter meetings are downtown. Offer to host a meeting in the suburbs and work with the chapter to offer events in other places. I know this is an issue for smaller states with one chapter in the biggest town or state capital. Lawyers elsewhere want to participate, but the events

puts these emails in an ACC folder, and read them when you have time. The eGroup is a robust mechanism to facilitate amazing conversations, request help with an issue or find sample documents. I find the eGroup to be the second most helpful resource ACC has to offer (right behind networking).

If you don't want to post a message, search the archives to see if your issue has been addressed previously. Or, if you see an issue close to something you are grappling with, pick up the phone and call the person who asked the question. Going back to what I said about people wanting to help each other, I have had very good luck doing this, and getting issues addressed and problems solved. This eGroup is also a good way to find others in your industry or geographic area. It is helpful to pick two or three people and build up your own small law department buddy system.

Roundtables: The last tip for breaking the isolation is to join a roundtable group. Many sponsors and law firms run groups; every quarter or so, they bring people together at a restaurant to discuss relevant topics. Usually, you have cocktails and then dinner. Sometimes, there is a speaker from the organizing group; other times, the format is a facilitated discussion. Regardless of the structure, these events are an informal way of getting to know others in your area and your service providers.

If you have other tips for breaking the isolation of being in a small law department, please email me and I will share the tips on our SLD eGroup or in a monthly call. 

Have a comment on this article? Visit ACC's blog at www.inhouseaccess.com/articles/acc-docket.

Breaking the Isolation

BY SONYA L. SIGLER

isolation we face as the only in-house lawyers in our companies.

Afterwards, I polled a few other small law department lawyers on how they cope with the isolation. What follows is a list of tips for breaking the isolation and making the most of your department.

Network: Networking takes time, and the ACC Annual Meeting is the perfect place to network and meet other lawyers (small law or otherwise). People usually are willing to help others when they are asked. Make an effort to meet two to three new people, or ask the ones you do know if they know other lawyers in your industry or geographic area. I put Sharon in touch with three other lawyers, one from her industry and two from similar geographic locations.

Participate in the SLD Committee calls: I know what you're thinking: "I don't have time for another meeting or a call that I don't need to be on." But calendar the monthly calls and get on the email distribution list so you can see the topics for each call. If the topic that month isn't of interest to you, delete it from your calendar

It is helpful to pick two or three people and build up your own small law department buddy system.

are a long way away. Participating in webinars and monthly committee calls is another way to stay involved, even if you can't attend the events in person.

SLD eGroup: This suggestion is a tough one — who needs more email, right? But you can always write a rule in your email tool that



Sonya L. Sigler is a vice president at SFL Data. Sigler is a member of ACC, ABA and The Sedona Conference Working Group 1 on Electronic Document Retention and Production, as well as a frequent writer and speaker on electronic discovery issues and other topics. She can be contacted at sonya@sfldata.com.