

MAKING NETWORKING WORK FOR YOU

BACKGROUND

The material for this Resource Sheet originates from a City Women's Network (CWN) evening meeting entitled 'Making Networking Work for You' which I presented in 1994 and have updated and repeated since, for over ten years, to a number of other membership organisations. My initial reaction when asked to do the first presentation was 'surely it just comes naturally, who would want to attend?' However, I was wrong and all events were fully subscribed, proving that there is curiosity about this subject and that people value the opportunity to practice networking in a structured, participative way.

Having been given the daunting task of talking to my peers on the subject, I set about doing some research and analysing my own techniques. Whilst I uncovered many types of networking, this Resource Sheet concentrates purely on business and personal networking in the context of everyday situations common to us all. It aims to offer some practical ideas on how to extend our networking skills. The checklist approach is designed to stimulate readers into trying new methods which may not have occurred to them previously or into reviewing some techniques used consciously or unconsciously.

Our aim should always be to be the first person that someone thinks of in our field!

WHAT IS IT?

Dictionary Definitions:

Websters New World

- a group system
- inter-connected: or co-operating individuals

Longman New Universal

- a system of criss-crossing lines or channels;
- an inter-connected chain, group or system

Other Definitions:

- 'Networking is the concept, technique and process of developing and nurturing career contacts within your field in order to pursue your career objectives or to help others do the same thing!'
- 'Networking is the art of developing and maintaining contacts; of creating opportunities to meet new people – and of using people, and being used by them, to further aims and ambitions or achieve objectives.'

For Women in Particular

- 'A vital process in the professional arena': 'Getting together to get ahead'

6 Degrees of Separation

- It is said that none of us are more than 6 people away from reaching anyone else in the world

Other thoughts

- Women's networks provide the women's answer to the Old Boy Network - both are valid
- The "City" – a big network that grew from coffee house chat
- What goes round comes round – Networking is circular
- In theory, Networking is Infinite

- Networking is Global
- Networking should be spontaneous and reciprocal
- Networking is time consuming, requires effort and is a long term investment not a quick fix

Networking Is A Two-Way Process

Visualise the process of Networking

A Garden - consisting of well established trees and bushes, flowers at different stages of growth and seeds which have not yet germinated. Our range of contacts over the years.

A Tree - there is a limit to the territory covered by the trunk itself, but the branches and twigs cover a wide area and extend the space occupied beyond the sole capacity of the trunk. We represent the trunk, the branches are our contacts stretching wider afield.

The Ripple Effect - caused by a stone thrown into the water. One contact can have many repercussions.

A Spider's Web - its interwoven nature enables the spider to catch hold of moving objects (ideas, people) which would normally be beyond its (our) grasp. The web (network) enables the spider to survive.

HOW?

What is the first thing you do when you enter a room where a function or event is taking place? You probably look first to see if there is anyone whom you recognise or know. Failing that, you are likely to search for a friendly, outgoing face or someone with whom you can identify (dress and bearing would affect your initial choice). A very extrovert person is unlikely to seek out an introvert and vice versa.

On meeting someone for the first time

- State **your** name first, listen carefully then repeat the other person's name silently
- Find something in common and develop it
- Find out type of business or profession
- Find out where he/she lives or works
- Find out a common leisure interest
- Find out common background
- Find out whom you know in common
- Find out whom you know in the other person's field
- Think what leads/information you can give to help the other person
- Find something on which to compliment the other person – but only if genuine
- Show interest, give undivided attention
- Build rapport make the person feel valued
- Use their name out loud – get their business card (ask for theirs rather than offering yours)

On a continuing basis

- Acknowledge change of address cards or notification of new job
- Send thank you letters for time given to you/lunch/other invitations/leads or help- your feedback is vital
- Be visible, join committees and contribute
- Christmas cards and annual letter on what you are doing
- Send on newspaper articles to people for whom they will be of interest
- Send congratulations on new appointment seen in the press – magazine articles etc.

- Make automatic connections between people who have common interests – mutuality
- Go to exhibitions and trade fairs.
- Include the women(men) – don't limit your opportunities
- Go to professional meetings and networking groups
- Always be prepared to meet someone – you never know where it will lead
- Always carry business cards, even when going to purely social events
- On training courses, network with delegates and the course leader
- Dinners/lunches/social events/ on holiday/health club/ golf club etc.
- Interviews where you haven't got the job (and if you have)
- Keep your database up to date (business card file, computer database, address book)
- Keep abreast of who is where and doing what
- Use opportunities to keep in touch. Send congratulations card (or fax) on an achievement; get well, new baby or retirement cards
- Use letters/phone/answerphone/word of mouth/fax /email etc
- 'Massage' your network – keep in touch to keep it alive
- Introduce people to organisations which you belong to and enjoy
- Keep your database up to date, develop a system

Realise it's a very small world

WHY?

Networking is based on the human need for interaction and our natural desire to associate with people with whom we have an affinity, i.e. basically people who are like us and with whom we feel comfortable, not threatened. On the whole, people like to be contacted, consulted and included. Generally too, they like to be of help and assistance to others.

- to develop a matrix of loyal, caring, sympathetic friends and associates
- because there is too much going on for us to deal with or know about on our own
- to exchange information, keeping up to date on market trends etc.
- sometimes it's not what you know, it's who you know (or who knows you)
- for moral support; for a friendly shoulder to lean on; for inside information; for advice and ideas
- the best ideas occur in relaxed situations
- for leads and referrals; for feedback; for a confidential talk; for an unexpected invitation or an insight you had not considered before
- to get the **real** truth when checking references
- to combat isolation, to share frustration, to talk things over.

'You Don't Know Who Knows Whom'

WHEN AND WHERE?

- internally at work, with colleagues, bosses, subordinates
- externally at work with clients, suppliers, professional contacts, ex-colleagues
- the average professional comes into contact with hundreds of people a year – Networking opportunities in the making
- everyday in all types of situations both business and social. Networking contacts occur when you least expect them to, so be prepared mentally to recognise opportunities

Remember, ALWAYS CARRY YOUR BUSINESS CARDS

DO'S

- do be willing to assist others, without any foreseeable returns
- do follow up – don't leave it to the other person to pick up the 'phone
- do concentrate on people you feel comfortable with
- do work hard at it by keeping in touch, so that you will be remembered
- do trace connection back to original contact when appropriate
- do be patient – it is a long-term process, not a quick fix
- do be courteous and acknowledge assistance received
- do reciprocate, it's a two-way process, expect to return favours
- do cultivate the grapevine (receptionists and postroom staff)
- do study internal politics and culture
- do deliver promises; do put yourself out – go the extra mile
- do get out and about, do make the effort to meet people
- do filter out unwanted approaches whilst recognising and nurturing useful contacts
- **do keep confidences and be discreet** (*this can't be emphasised enough*)
- do be approachable, you only have one opportunity to make a good first impression
- do recognise the value of a pool of reliable people to contact in a crisis

Do be fun to be with, so that people will want more of your company!

DONT'S

- don't neglect long term acquaintances in favour of new ones
- don't let people go – keep in touch
- don't overwork your network or take people for granted
- don't get a bad reputation – it can work against you 'reverse networking'
- don't be discouraged if someone doesn't want to network with you – concentrate on those who do. *NB If you have too many rebuffs, consider your style and approach – are you being too pushy?*
- don't expect networking to solve all your problems
- don't exploit your network, too often can be too much (the balloon that bursts or the rubber band that snaps is useless)
- don't exclude 'offbeat' or zany people from your network, keep your network broadbased
- don't use up all your favours, keep some in reserve (like power)

DON'T OVERDO IT; DON'T BE AGGRESSIVE OR TOO SERIOUS

RECOMMENDED FOLLOW-UPS

the ultimate guide to successful networking - Carole Stone - £4.99 published by Vermillion - www.randomhouse.co.uk

Career Networking - Laurel Alexander - £8.99 published by How to Books

Effective Networking - Venda Raye-Johnson - £9.95 published by Fifty Minute Series.
Book Distributed by Flex Training Ltd. (Tel: 01462 895544)

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