



YES – BUT WHAT DO YOU *REALLY* WANT TO DO?

Even as business owners or GM's we all are business entities in our own right – but do we really know what business we're in and how to go about marketing ourselves and therefore our company - for progression and growth?

Networking I hear you say! Yes – one channel if you know what the product delivery is.

But for many people, “networking” is a dirty word and a vile concept. Why? Because it smacks of ulterior motive, premeditation and insincerity. Is there anything more distasteful than the habit of buttering up strangers in order to use them for personal gain?

However here's a surprise. Networking does not have to be double-dealing, bogus or crafty. Most of us, including a good percentage of those who sniff disdainfully at the idea of creating and maintaining a network of professional relationships, have at some stage gained a client or arrived at a job, courtesy of a contact. We might even have employed people based on a colleague's recommendation. (As everybody knows, a snappy CV and a reference that sings doesn't stand much of a chance against a colleague's recommendation.)

That's not to say that networking “snobs” are hypocrites, even if they have been prospering from vigorously practicing what they purport to loathe. They – all right, lets be honest, we – just don't recognize when we're doing it.

At any gathering of people in a function, whether it's a funeral, wedding or professional association, networking takes place.

It's not a discrete business or career management technique. It's a natural human condition. It's well nigh impossible for people to enrich their growth without alliances and partnership. And to get alliances and partnerships, you need to network. QED.

It is agreed that if we can accept we're always inadvertently networking, then the logical next step is to impose a little logic to how we go about it.

You could enhance the manner of how you network. A thank-you letter or thank-you e-mail as a follow-up after a person has facilitated your information gathering. Think back to what grandma said: fundamental politeness is the real issue. But no one minds sharing information if the motive is an ethical one and, secondly, the approach is civil. They may even be flattered!

Define networking as “information gathering or introducing to another person”.

You're after data or people or both. The most critical thing is to define for yourself what it is that you are seeking. You can't just go into a meeting of people and bail someone up and say, “I'm seeking career happiness, and can you help me?” You've got to get your information need quite specific before you open your mouth.

Otherwise people think, “Who’s this weird person? Blow it. I won’t help them.”

The trick to networking, then, appears to be twofold. First, admit the necessity of nurturing alliances and partnerships. And then, rather than feeling slippery and counterfeit in your dealings, cast aside your copy of *People Using for Beginners* and instead be completely open.

It makes sense. After all, how else could you respect yourself in the morning?

But first – **“What is YOUR value proposition?”**

You are able to define it for your Company, aren’t you? - Why not for yourself as the Company?

A recent CMG survey of 481 senior executives across the private sector in the Services Industry showed that 91% could not articulate a clear answer to this very question with focus and clarity. In fact they didn’t really know - is a fair interpretation. Welcome to the human race everyone!

In other words – where are YOU heading, why and what can YOU bring to the target’s table? ***Let’s determine that first – OK?***

Then, and only then, you can state the reason for your request. You don’t have to be secretive about it. The person you ask either says, “I know the person who could facilitate this”, or they don’t.

The next step in your new networking life is to start casting about for someone willing to take a lasting interest in your business and career. In short you need to go shopping for a mentor. And don’t be intimidated. People want to help you. Really.

Think of fundamental human nature. People like being asked for their opinions. It’s fundamental vanity of humankind. That is why senior people, subject to the nature of the approach and the stated reason, are only too willing to help.

And don’t assume that if you’re at a serious cross road, you’re living in a network-free zone.

As a for instance, a recently published survey of Executive coaches from 33 countries surveyed job-search success rates, networking accounted for 65 per cent of job placements, and for executives it was 75 percent. Responses to print media advertisements accounted for 9 per cent.

This does not mean the unemployed are simply cold-calling companies and hoping for the best. Rather, they are following the basic principles of networking. If they can, so can you.

Work out what it is you want to do and why, what it is you want to find out and get in contact with whoever you think has the information you require and state the reasons why you’re asking in essentially a civil and polite fashion.

It’s not a discrete growth management technique. It’s a natural human condition.

Ten strategies for *effective* networking

1. You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours

Trust the principle that if you ask for ideas or referrals people will respond because in the future they may want to come to you. What goes around.....

2. Don't be intimidated.

Most people in business understand networking and will welcome your inquiry. Also, even if you think you're inexperienced, consider what you have to offer.

3. Plan your networking.

Create a list of people you know and ask them for ideas, referrals and contacts. Every contact you make while working is the potential jewel in your networking crown.

4. Maintain your contacts.

Once you have your job don't forget who helped get you there. Maybe there's something they need that you can help them with.

5. Find a mentor and a coach

Senior executives are not as remote or hostile to your inquiries as you may think and are often only too happy to be asked their opinion. And try that third party professional sounding board.

6. Look Close to home.

Sometimes the most valuable networking you can do is within your company. They know you and you know them.

7. Don't wait until you're desperate.

Keep your network healthy so that if the work climate changes you're ready for it. In other words, don't rest on your oars.

8. Always ask permission to use a name.

By mentioning names, you are able to capitalise on your contact's reputation and implicit approval. So it pays not to offend by assuming their concurrence beforehand.

9. Report back.

Show you understand and appreciate others' effort and contribution. It paves the way for future contact

10. Be polite and clear.

A civil, polite inquiry that doesn't beat around the bush is more likely to be welcomed.

REMEMBER - WITHOUT A PLAN, YOU ARE A TOURIST!

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