



Get Networking

1 August 2012

"I need to be networking", is something that lots of folks at some stage say to me. And they say it in such a way that it clearly holds as much fun for them as root canal treatment. They say it, with a hidden plea of, "Tell me how to make it easier and more exciting than I think it is". Most of us do recognize the enormous benefits that accompany being a great networker; folks to refer customers to us, folks who can tell us of job vacancies or help us find that dream job, folks who can provide a recommendation to a tried and tested doctor. Heck, maybe our contacts can even provide us with our dream date.

One of the reasons that folk are reluctant to network is the belief that they would not be good at networking. They believe networking is for the extroverts, the highly social among us, and they may even believe there is something pretentious and a bit fake about networking. There may be those folks out there networking who do subscribe to this, however, understand that networking is also for the introvert, the socially reclusive person who hates crowds, and the deeply serious person too. You can network one-to-one with people. You can network over the internet without even having to leave your house. And you will probably get more out of networking if you act as yourself - the real, genuine, true you.

So let us get started:

What would you like to achieve from networking? Is it to gain more business prospects? Is it to meet more folks to improve your social life? Is it to share knowledge about your particular profession? Is it to find someone to accompany you on cycling trips or hiking trips? Is it just to meet more like-minded people with similar interests because you have moved to a new town? Understanding your purpose for networking helps you decide where to look for contacts. You can then sign up for meetings, groups, clubs, dinners, internet groups etc. that are related to what you need. It is much easier to network if you have something similar to discuss with others you are meeting or chatting to. Instead of having to dream up all manner of small talk, you can talk about what you have in common. And when folks talk about what interests them, either work or recreation, they are interesting to others. To forge relationships, take a genuine interest in other folk.

Build your network:

Some folks are very gung ho and will happily walk into any venue or gathering, even if they don't know a soul there, and starting talking up a storm. (I confess I am like this - I am happy to talk to anyone, anywhere.) If this is not you, don't worry, there are easier ways to begin. You can start by getting in touch with people you have already met. Find old school or college friends, relatives you have lost touch with, and ex- work colleagues by going through old phone records, your little black book, facebook, etc. Send them a message, phone them up, or email them. Ask how they are and tell them what you are up to. If these are people you already know, you can reminisce which helps get the communication going. If you know you are an introvert then make friends / tap into the network of extroverts. If you don't know many people remember some know lots of folks.



Step up the pace:

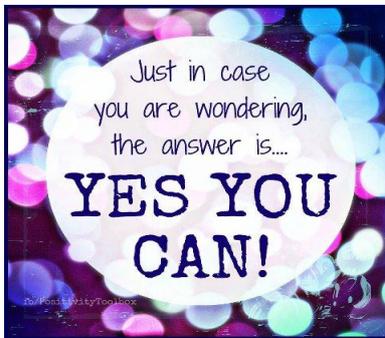
When you are talking to people find out what they do for a living and what they do for recreation. Also find out what their significant other, family members, and close friends do and are interested in as well. You may find that you meet Jane at a book club and talking to her you find out that she has a brother who is a personal trainer/gym instructor. When your best friend tells you that she is looking for a gym instructor you know someone she can contact. And you never know when someone you know or have heard of will tell you about that dream job just when you need it most.

Records:

Um, yes, not exciting I know, but some level of organization will give you better results. Start a networking file (paper or electronic). Once you meet folks write down details about where and when you met them. And add some details about their work and their interests. One year later you are not going to remember exactly who the person was who told you that their uncle was starting a new marketing business. If you have filed notes, you can go back and look it up.

Keep up contact:

Make contact with your networks. Don't just get a business card or phone number and forget about the person. Don't stalk them either though, most folks are quite busy, so phone calls 6 times a day is not good. Invite people out for lunch, drinks, or coffee to catch up. You can also invite folks to do things related to your interests if they share similar interests to you. You want to establish a connection beyond your initial meeting. Send them an article that might interest them. If there is a tragedy in their family or home town send them good wishes and your support. Keep track of birthdays and send birthday wishes. Let people know that you haven't forgotten about them.



"Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage" - Anais Nin

Work your network:

Tap into your network every now and again, such as when you need a job, a date or even a partner to go hiking with. If you have tickets to a concert and you have no one to go with you, ask your network for assistance. You can say something like, "I find myself in a bit of a tight spot right now. I have this spare ticket to go to the concert on Friday evening, do you know of anyone who might enjoy it with me?" When you are asking for a favor, don't be apologetic. There is nothing to be sorry for, and it just signals a lack of confidence and professionalism. All you are doing is seeing if someone is in a position to help you. You are not making demands nor forcing someone to help you if they don't want to.

Give to others:

Doing good works or something for free for others can help you build very good networks and get very good publicity if that is what you want. If you are looking to connect with others and create mutually beneficial relationships, a good way to start is by thinking of ways in which you can help other folks. And when you do people favors they are keen to reciprocate.

Have an awesome August, and get networking. Take that first step tomorrow.

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