

business
ideas
from a new perspective

networking excellence
SPECIAL REPORT *volume 1*

*featuring a selection of networking
and business building articles by*

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Robyn Henderson*

the perfect
“keep in touch”
tool to send to
your network
in 2006

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Network or Perish

BY ROBYN HENDERSON

Latest research shows that only 20% of employment opportunities are advertised in Australia. Networking accounts largely for the remaining 80% of job placements. Whether it's an executive recruitment firm search, word of mouth referral or someone's next door neighbour's brother – the job is often filled by someone known by someone else.

In the best selling book, *Masters of Networking*, Bill Gates refers to the "trilogy of trust" – the trust that one person has in another, which is then passed along to a third referred member.

Whether it's a job opportunity, the name of a good doctor or motor mechanic, people want to do business with people they know like and trust. If they don't know someone in a specific area, based on the trust they have for another person, they will often accept their recommendation. Smart leaders and networkers today surround themselves with people who are better than them in certain areas. They are willing to acknowledge it and pay for that experience if necessary. Bill Gates says, "For me, a big part of the fun has always been to hire and work with smart people. I enjoy learning from them."

Author Harvey Mackay believes "its not who you know, but who knows what you know." One of the challenges we face in Australia is that people are not encouraged to self promote. They often face ridicule and criticism for being pushy. We often refer to it as the "tall poppy syndrome." Many people are reluctant to stand out from the crowd or try to be noticed. As a result

many people are overlooked for promotions and opportunities, because no one knows how good they are or what actual skills they have. Because they are not visible or well known by the decision makers, often someone of less ability lands the position or project.

Tall Poppies Alternative

If you are wanting to increase your visibility within your organization or profession, you don't need to be pushy, or monopolise conversations. It helps though if you talk people "up" rather than gossiping in a destructive manner. One of the universal laws well known to networkers is the law of reciprocity – what you give out comes back tenfold. So if you gossip about someone today, it may be your turn tomorrow. Why not try a gossip free day every week. Look for positive ways of discussing people within your network. If you don't know a lot about the people you are working with, practise your listening skills, ask open ended questions (starting with who, what, how, when, where or why). Most importantly, unless it is culturally unacceptable, make eye contact with the person you are speaking to. Listen with your heart as well as your ears.

This means having a focussed conversation and remaining in the present moment, not distracted by past or future events.

Avoid Elevator Talk

In our time poor society, moving conversations occur regularly when one person asks another a question, but does not stop to hear the answer. "Morning, how was your weekend?" without stopping for a nanosecond to hear the answer, we continue moving – hence the coining of the phrase elevator talk. If you don't have the time to stop and listen to the answer, why not change your greeting. "Good morning John" and smile, will give you a much better response than a random question when you can't be bothered or are unable to stop and hear the answer.

Broaden Your Networks

Another trap many people fall into, is networking only within their industry or profession. Dismissing people because they are 'nobodies' (in their opinion) or presumably of no use to them. Master networkers never use people. Again the philosophy of treating people the way you would like to be treated is critical if you are to be remembered positively by the variety of people you meet throughout the week.

Aim to network across the board age-wise, industry-wise and geographically. You may think you will never have the need for a computer programmer living in Dallas, Texas. And you may be right. However, your boss may just be looking for the name of a competitor or prospect in Dallas, Texas and you just happen to have the name of this person. . . .and so it goes. You start to be noticed by decision makers as a problem solver. They have a problem and you are able to solve it for them.

Become a Sphere Of Influence

Smart networkers acknowledge that they don't know everyone and don't need to know everyone. They do need to have a network of key players, who on a mutual request basis, can tap them into the key people they need. These key players are often referred to as spheres of influence. They are people who know a little bit about a lot of things, and a lot about one or two things (usually their area of expertise or interest). They are proficient at sharing the piece of information that their contact needs. And most importantly they share that information freely, knowing that one day, they may be the one doing the asking.

Networking is a life skill, not just something you do when you want something. Following the universal law of giving without expectations, master networkers give without remembering and receive without forgetting.

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"its not who you know, but who knows what you know."

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How To Generate Endless Referrals

BY ROBYN HENDERSON

Businesses live or die by the volume of regular referrals they receive. Yet many business operators place little or no energy on the art of giving and receiving referrals. As a result they regularly experience erratic cash flow. Let's look at six strategies to ensure you maintain your regular referral flow.

1. Where Do They Come From?

Diarise time next week, to track your last 25–50 clients, where they came from, how much \$\$ value you place on past and future business opportunities with them, and how much money was spent to get their business in the first place? If the business came from a referee or sphere of influence, did you in fact acknowledge or thank that person and advise them of the outcome of the lead.

TIP: Many referral sources dry up, because the referral recipient did not follow up or give feedback. Always give feedback to your referees, whether actual business eventuates or not.

2. How Well Do You Know Your Prospects?

Create and maintain a database of prospects and aim to add to this list every week. Keep updating information about these potential clients until you have complete contact details, list of their interests outside of work and any major achievements. The more you know about someone, the easier it is to communicate and network with them regularly.

TIP: You will get real value from the magazines and newspapers that you read, by looking for items that may be of interest to your prospects. Cutting out an article, or better still sending a copy of the magazine itself, with a with compliments slip on the page of the relevant article—with a note, 'Saw this and thought of you'—will certainly make you top of mind with these prospects.

3. How Often Do You Make Contact?

The universal law of recency states, that the person who made the last contact, more often than not, is the person who gets the business. Not everyone has effective data management systems in place. So, when they need a new supplier or to re-connect with an old supplier, they often have no way of tracking where your business card is, or how to connect with you.

If you are regularly sending prospects and clients an e-zine, newsletter, update, new product release, or just a keep in touch article, you make it easy for people to do business with you.

TIP: Make contact with current clients and prospects every 60–90 days. Ideally send something that will be of interest to them—not just something that promotes your business.

4. Visibility Is Critical

Building a profile in your community or industry can be costly. However, some low cost/no cost ideas would be to have a magnetic strip with your business name and contact details put on your car. Wearing a name badge when you shop locally, helps people get to know your name as well as what it is that you do. Reports show that 80% of the population have trouble remembering names, so again we are making it easy for people to make contact with us. Sponsorship of the printing of a local school's newsletter or junior sports team can be very inexpensive and may give you access to potential clients. Offering to contribute a regular column in the community newspaper lets you share useful information as well as get the spin off of raising your profile.

TIP: Aim for regular community exposure, rather than one-off splashes that can quickly be forgotten.

5. Spend Money Locally

Spending money in your community not only contributes to the local economy and provides employment opportunities—it is great way of showing support to others. Sometimes you pay slightly more for certain products, however, if you want people to support your business, look at how you can support theirs.

TIP: As Anita Roddick says, think globally, act locally.

6. Give Away A Referral Every Day

We have all heard the saying, 'What you give out comes back tenfold'. The law of reciprocity at work can give us a steady flow of leads and referrals. If you are unable to give a daily hot business lead, think about referring a restaurant, movie, supplier or share a positive customer appreciation story within your network. As this becomes a daily habit, you will find that you start to receive daily referrals from others. The interesting phenomena with referrals is that the people you give the referrals to, are always indirectly connected to the people you receive referrals from.

TIP: Always ask the new client or prospect, 'How did you hear about my business or me?' If you don't track referrals they are guaranteed to disappear.

The final tip in giving referrals must be to always ask for feedback. 'I have found John to be a true professional; if he doesn't meet your expectations, please let me know.' Mastering the art of giving referrals may take practice, however, when mastered, it will ensure the longevity and growth of your home-based business.

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'How did you hear about my business or me?'

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Master networkers are global citizens

BY ROBYN HENDERSON

A global citizen could be defined as someone who looks at the bigger picture—the global picture, and adapts that world view to their own community or organization. Master networkers all share that global vision. As Anita Roddick says, *Think globally, act locally*. Global citizens individually are conscious of their own triple bottom line. The triple bottom line—another buzz word or faddish jargon or is it the answer to the corporate world profits today. Many companies reviewing their poor results for the year are considering that possibly striving for profits above all else is, in fact, back firing on them and driving the profits down. As a citizen, is it just about how much money we can make and spend or does quality of life, consider a lot more than just the \$\$.

So what is the triple bottom line? *Companies or individuals consciously focussing on a combination of:*

People, Planet and Profit

Rather than making profit or money their sole motivator, enlightened organizations and individuals are looking beyond the dollars and creating preferred working environments. Places where people seek employment, not just for the salary packages, but rather for their company's commitment to the community as well as the environment. Companies that are aware that 10–12 hour days are not

healthy for the individual or the company. Mistakes are made through tiredness and lack of concentration. Preferred work places where senior managers literally chase their managers out of the building after 6.00pm—encouraging them to get home and have a life. For some this new way of thinking is frightening and needs some major adjustment in their life. For others they talk in high praise of the organization that they feel part of. The community that they, as individuals, share.

So let's look at what has triggered this movement. In the 90s we saw dramatic retrenchments, downsizing, re-engineering, call it what you will, the bottom line was there were less and less people to do the same amount of work.

Even high salaries weren't enough to keep good workers; they started to look for more balance, more company caring. Networking events abounded with speakers talking about "finding balance", "looking within" and saying no to increased demands from employers. Many resigned only to be invited back as consultants at often a much higher rate of pay and hours to suit the individual rather than the company.

Television shows like *Sea Change* shot through the roof with their ratings as people considered how they could make their own sea change and many did.

Astute investors are looking for ethical investments. Putting their money and energy behind supporting companies who are clearly showing support of the environment and the community. Some organizations are seconding their staff to work on a part or full time basis with community groups—a very humbling experience for many.

Visibility is critical—Be Seen, Get Known, Move Ahead

The basis of the triple bottom line is the basis of networking—treat people the way you would like to be treated. So how can we do this on a practical basis, how can we become master networkers and global citizens, with our own triple bottom line awareness.

Here's a few simple ideas you may consider:

- Do your homework on your service providers. Do they support the community, how well are their staff treated? If you don't agree with all of their policies, look for an alternate provider, even if it costs a little more.
- How much money do you spend in your local community? The ripple effect from spending locally provides employment, keeps businesses trading and most of all keeps money circulating locally
- Where do you make your larger purchases? Would paying 5% more make that big a difference to you if you were able to purchase within 10 minutes from home?
- What about travel and holidays? With the weakened Australian dollar, more travellers are realising the magnificence of their own country and region. A travel agent recently told me that most Australians have seen more of the world than they have of their own State. How well do you know your own neighbourhood and city, let alone state or country?
- Do you recycle? Most homes these days are equipped with recycled garbage areas and are well supported. But what about recycling larger goods, like books, outdated computer equipment, mobile phones, and furniture? One person's trash is another person's treasure. Many charities can often arrange collection of sizeable donations of goods.
- Is buying Australian made goods and products important to you? Sometimes you have to ask many questions to find these products, maybe even write to a supermarket or department store requesting Australian made items. Global citizens know that long term it's about short-term pain for long term gain for you and the country. What if all CDs, books and videos made and produced in Australia, bore an 'Australian artist' sticker?

As the triple bottom line becomes the rule rather than the exception, global citizens will network more and more with like minded individuals and support organizations who realise that it's not up to the government or the boss, it's up to me. And as a wise person once said IF IT'S TO BE, IT'S UP TO ME.

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“So what is the triple bottom line?”

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No Strings Networking

BY ROBYN HENDERSON

In our time poor society, attending a business networking function may be the last thing employees and business owner operators want to do at the end of a busy day. Yet smart networkers are realising that with a bit of planning it is possible to combine their interests, building relationships, networking and having fun at the same time. They are realising if they have an interest in something, maybe their latest prospect or client may also share that interest. All you have to do is ask! "I'm going to a golf day next month, would you like to come?" Only a keen golfer would agree to go as most people know when it comes to sport participation, you can't exactly fake it until you make it!

Traditionally golf days and sporting events have been the domain of the serious male networking—yet these days both sexes are realising that combining networking with getting a life can result in business opportunities. And many women are becoming a whole lot more creative with their networking pursuits. Trust is the glue that keeps networking together and what better way to build trust than getting to know someone in a social setting with a shared interest.

So let's look at some different yet popular non-traditional no strings networking possibilities:

- **SPA DAYS:** a social day at a day spa may appeal to females more than males—yet some corporations are rewarding clients and their business development staff with this innovative way of relaxing and unwinding. Plus the day spas are more than happy to provide a great rate for group bookings.
- **RUNNING:** Fun-runs and running competitively either in a corporate games event or a lunchtime game can again bridge that gap between client and service provider.
- **TRIVIA NIGHTS:** These events usually include donating the proceeds to a favourite charity and are sometimes held in a pub or club to add to the atmosphere. Often the office geek becomes the hero as they shine with a photographic memory and an ability to get more answers right than wrong.
- **VOLUNTEERING:** for a charity fun raising event or special interest group—usually assisting disadvantaged groups. This might take the shape of inviting a table full of guests to a fundraiser on one extreme, to actually donning overalls, mops and buckets and giving a pensioners home a makeover. The more physical the activity, the more team bonding seems to happen e.g. Clean Up Australia campaign—office attend as a group to clean up a local area.
- **TOASTMASTERS:** many large corporations have an in-house Toastmasters group, which is a great way for staff across

the board not only to improve their presentation skills, but also getting to know each other better. The cross networking opportunities occur when members of one club attend another corporate club, enter competitions, or volunteer to present at other clubs locally or nationally.

- **BOOK CLUBS:** again a more social event, which can consist of people coming together to share one book that everyone has read, or people coming together with individual books and sharing their thoughts and feedback. Again this does not look like networking, but it can combine education, fun and companionship
- **FITNESS:** may take the shape of gym membership—what a great thank you gift for a client (as long as they are interested in fitness and would not take offence with the gift). Other potential team sports might include golf, tennis, darts, pool, bush walking and swimming
- **ACADEMY AWARDS NIGHTS GUESSING COMPETITION:** guests are invited to enter their choices a week prior to the awards night. On the night they create their own Academy Awards night theme with formal wear, and pretend statues and prizes go to the guests who select the most winners on the night. Again a relatively low cost event with a big WOW factor.
- **MELBOURNE CUP SWEEPS/AFTERNOONS:** an oldie and still a goody. Lots of fun, a full afternoon and the budget is whatever you want it to be. If your clients are unable to attend, you can still allocate a horse for them in the sweep.
- **KNITTING AND NATTERING NIGHTS:** have you heard that knitting is the new meditation? And knitting and nattering nights are sweeping the country. Some people just come for the nattering; others come for the knitting, but what transpires is a relaxing environment with interesting conversation no pressure, no alcohol or big meals—just friendship, laughter and fun—and males and females are attending.

'Trust is the glue that keeps networking together'

So the next time you moan under the weight of your business-networking diary, glance over the above list and see if you can put a sparkle back into your networking and have some fun at the same time. The no-strings networking is what is often referred to as accidental networking—it just happens. When laughter, conversation, fun and friendship come together—the result is trust and trust is the foundation for serious networking results.

HAVE FUN!

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Be Seen, get known, move ahead

BY ROBYN HENDERSON

How to secure your next promotion and fast-track your career

As you identify your career goals over the next five years, it's important to make sure you are noticed for all the right reasons! The basics of career progression include being organised, polite and an expert on the procedures and products within your organisation. So let's break that down into manageable segments. If you are not strong in all of the following areas, focus on improving this area by 10% each year—your superiors will notice the difference.

1. Pull Your Weight

If you are pulling your weight, you don't stop when you've finished your allotted tasks. You look around to see if someone else is struggling under a heavy workload, and offer to help. You think about the overall health and well-being of the team, not just yourself.

TIP: Treat people the way you would like to be treated.

2. Acknowledge The Contribution Of Others

Most of us have been in a situation where one person does all or most of the work, and someone else lines up to take the credit. This often happens when someone is new on the job, and has to do all the groundwork. Meanwhile, someone else gets to polish their work and make it look good. Good leaders and master networkers always give credit where credit is due. Your superiors will be impressed by your leadership qualities in getting others to work as a team, and those who are helping you will be pleased that you acknowledged their efforts.

TIP: If you generously give credit to others, you'll find it always comes back to you tenfold.

3. Don't Be Afraid To Ask For Help

If you don't know how to do something, ask. If you don't catch on the first time, ask again. There is no shame in not knowing "how". Plus you will get more respect from others if you show more concern for getting it right than trying to cover up a lack of knowledge.

TIP: Costly mistakes have been made by people who don't want to admit they lack knowledge or expertise.

4. Always Stay Positive

What a boost a positive person gives to a workplace! If you remain positive no matter what the day throws at you, people will always seek you out and find pleasure in your company.

TIP: Keep in mind a good laugh helps to break a tense situation.

5. Don't Gossip About Others

Not even a little bit! Somehow or other, it always seems to get back. Stick to the principle: "if you haven't got anything good to say about others, don't say anything at all."

TIP: If someone starts gossiping, change the subject or turn it aside with a comment like, "I guess she thought she was acting for the best." It won't take long for others to realise that you won't be drawn into gossip sessions. They may not like your response, but they will respect you for it. They will also know they can trust you to keep a confidence.

6. Work To Deadlines

In business, deadlines are a part of life. If you are in management, you may have to lead staff to achieve set goals and quotas. If you're part of the staff, you have to meet those deadlines or let others down. However, there is nothing like a reputation for being reliable and delivering on time.

TIP: When you are asked to give an estimated completion time, calculate a reasonable span of time (one that won't have you stressing to finish it) and add a couple of hours/days, depending on the complexity of the task. It's far better to under-promise and over deliver.

7. Stay Calm In A Crisis

It's easy to get carried away by the general feeling of panic when there's some sort of crisis, but you'll earn more respect if you take a deep breath, roll up your sleeves up and look for the best way to deal with the situation. – work out what is needed immediately to "plug any leaks", so to speak. Do whatever has to be done to prevent the situation from getting worse. Work out whether the most important thing is to go back and fix what went wrong, or to look into the immediate future to prevent trouble further down the line.

TIP: Look for all causes and effects, and deal with them in order of importance. Then see if you can recommend a course of action so the problem won't crop up again.

Often the people who are promoted are not necessarily the best person for the job, rather they are the most visible. Increase your visibility, expand your network and always be professional.

Always remember the window of opportunity is so clear, that sometimes we miss it.

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"Treat people
the way you
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7 innovative ideas for low cost networking

BY ROBYN HENDERSON

Tough times and cash flow shortages call for innovative ways of keeping in touch with people who form part of your strategic alliance network. Our target may have been to initially communicate and ultimately build trust with spheres of influence in the community, who know a little bit about a lot of things and a lot about two or three areas. Often one of these areas is their work and passion, the other two may be sporting or cultural areas and the third often a charity or support group. These key networkers in the area can open many doors for us, once they feel confident enough with our level of professionalism, service and ability.

Sometimes master networkers test us with a small job – a throw away, fiddly, low profit job and we may question, is it really worth doing? Many suppliers have missed valuable opportunities by knocking back that one job, only to find it was in fact the tip of the iceberg and in being unavailable for that work, we have lost the opportunity to have the door opened to their vast network and unlimited referrals.

So lets look at ways to increase visibility within your network – in ways that do not incur huge \$\$ or time. With each of the following ideas – be very clear – THIS IS NOT A SELLING OPPORTUNITY – DO NOT SELL. This is purely a building trust, letting them get to know you better exercise. Be very clear on this – increased visibility is your outcome – and sales will result from this ultimately. This is a strategic BE SEEN, GET KNOWN, MOVE AHEAD exercise.

1. FITNESS – exercise is a great way to stay connected. You may mention that you have started a fitness program involving daily 3-5 km. walks and invite some of your allies along. Set up a time, meeting place and days of the week to meet– don't be discouraged if you only get a couple of takers – word will spread and your group will expand. And if it doesn't that's okay too. Once you have a core group of starters, you will find that you build trust very quickly with these people, in a non-threatening environment.

2. VOLUNTEERING – as you get to know the main spheres of influence in your network, observe the charities they may be involved with. Most charities have fund raising events throughout the year, and each event usually has a committee or special interest group. Offer your services to one of these committees. Be realistic about your time availability and avoid over-commitment. However, your skills can be put to good use and you are constantly expanding your network plus supporting a worthy cause. If you are already too over-committed for a committee position, why not offer to arrange a table or two of friends to support the event.

3. SCHOOL LEAVERS INFORMATION NIGHTS – a very successful real estate agent had a regular annual commitment with the local high schools speaking to year 11 and 12 students. The basis of her talk covered the do's and don'ts of renting units, bonds, setting up a flat for the first time, selecting good flatmates – all the things school leavers needed to know in their

first year out of school. A comprehensive handout was always included for the participants with her contact details. Non real estate agents may consider they could not offer this service. However, any employer could speak to students about what employers are looking for with apprenticeships, part and full time employees – everyone has something to offer this very impressionable group of future leaders.

4. WORKING BEES – Rotary clubs are famous for working bees in old peoples homes and aged communities. Again your expertise in gardening, painting, even rubbish removal can come in handy. It's just a case of looking for opportunities, identifying them and then offering that opportunity to someone in your network.

5. MOVIE/VIDEO NIGHTS – if you are a movie buff, this area is truly limitless. By starting a mid week movie night, with like minded people/potential allies – you create an opportunity to really have some fun. Again create a system – select potential movie goers, choice of two cinemas (one mainstream theatre / one more arthouse), decide on approx. session time and meeting place in a café close to theatre. You may decide to meet at the café, say 30 minutes before the session starts and then adjourn to the café after screening for coffee and debrief about the film. Each member of the group has an opportunity to select a film over a period of weeks and you can give an /10 rating – and prizes for the highest rating movie select or over a period of time.

6. ACADEMY AWARDS NIGHTS – there are all sorts of awards today from film, through to sport. The Academy Awards or Golden Globes is a great way of having some fun and networking with like-minded people. You might like to arrange an informal dinner on the night these events are screened and at least 72 hours before, ask each guest to vote on who they think will win the awards – prizes of course for the winner who selected the most winners.

7. MELBOURNE CUPSWEEPS – Running a Melbourne Cup sweep for your customers, allies and prospects is a great way of keeping in touch. Decide on the prizes (maybe you can swap/barter a voucher for your business with another organization), make a list of customers who will be involved with the exercise. Email them 7 days ahead to let them know to expect to hear from you on Melbourne Cup Day and what the prizes will be. Draw the sweep on the first Monday in November and then another email, fax or phone call will let them know their horse. Make sure the prizes arrive within 48 hours of the race being run. Be prepared for lots of positive feedback.

These seven simple ideas take organization more than money or time. However, if you can combine your own networking with having fun – watch out for all the business opportunities that come your way as a result of just doing things a little bit differently from your competitors.

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“combine your own networking with having fun”

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business ideas from a new perspective

NETWORKING

It's Okay To Ask For Help

BY ROBYN HENDERSON

One of the biggest mistakes people make when they are trying to grow their business or their career, is to avoid at all costs asking for help. So if asking for help is the most obvious way to solve a problem, why do many people resist to the point of failing themselves, rather than take that perceived gigantic step?

Would fear possibly contribute to their dilemma? Fear of being indebted to someone, fear of looking or sounding stupid by not knowing how to do something in the first place. And even frustration that although they consider themselves to be a smart, intelligent person – how come they can't do something as apparently easy as master computer technology, program a video recorder, or change a paper cartridge fax machine, without tearing their hair out.

Asking For Help Is The Answer To Most Questions.

"We are in a knowledge economy – information is the new currency."

As Harvey Mackey says, "it's not what you know, but who knows what you know." Master networkers spend a lifetime gathering useless pieces of trivia and information. They store it away, sometimes in a recorded format (if they are really organised). More often than not, it is in their head. Their mastery comes in being able to connect two or three seemingly obscure pieces of information and making them

relevant. We are in a knowledge economy – information is the new currency.

I recently met a trade delegation of women from Canada. Being very conscious of their financial outlay in coming to Australia, I wanted to be sure that they "got their moneys worth" so to speak. As I befriended the women, I asked the specific question, "When you return to Canada, what is one thing you really hope you will have achieved from your visit to Australia?" Armed with these answers, I was then able to connect them with relevant people within Australia, who definitely had the answers for them. Some even may be in a situation where they could form a strategic alliance or put them in touch with another person who could. Master networkers always treat people the way they would like to be treated.

Let's look at some of the asking for help options available to savvy networkers:

Fee For Service: This is by far the most popular – engage a tradesperson, service provider or professional who will normally quote for the job or service to be provided and charge accordingly. Yes we will pay more for this service, and the job will be done exactly how we want it. This is more often than not the most time efficient and in the long run economical way to ask for help.

Undertaking Training: Most skills can be learned and there are hundreds of courses available at TAFEs, evening colleges, BECs, universities, schools etc. . The choice is really – what value do we place on our time spent in mastering the skill versus the cost of paying someone to do the job for us?

A friend recently bemoaned the fact that she was having terrible trouble mastering web site building. I asked the question, why wouldn't you go to a recommended web master and get the job done in a quarter of the time? Her response was that she wanted to learn how it was done – even though she knew it would be a one off and she had no intention of embarking on a web site building career.

Each to his or her own – my thought was her time could have been spent better elsewhere, rather than mastering a one off skill.

Barter Services: What skills in your area of expertise, do you have to trade with another service provider, who has the skills that you want? One hour of your time giving some marketing advice, may be considered a fair swap for someone who can give you a lesson in mastering technology. Bartering always works when it is win/win – that means when both parties gain from the experience. This gain may not necessarily be financial – rather the experience of learning and mastering another skill and the opportunity to extend your network.

Volunteer: With the global trend towards people wanting to give back to the community – there is no shortage of people looking for groups that they can become involved with. Maybe gardening or renovating houses is something you are keen to learn about – seek out those charities who provide working bees at restoring homes or looking after pensioners premises. This is definitely a win/win for you – as you are doing something good for the community and learning at the same time.

Find A Mentor: Sometimes we are so busy working in our business and career, that we lose sight of the bigger picture. Finding a mentor for a short or long term role, can give you a very fresh perspective on your situation. Often a mentor has the ability to give you a hand up so to speak, in connecting you with key players who can open doors for you. Try asking the specific question, I am looking for a mentor who can assist me with my time management skills, who would you suggest I seek out for this role? Over ten years ago when I started my own business, I re-invented the wheel month after month, rather than ask people to show me a better way to do things. Not only did I waste time, money and energy, my business was stifled because of my fear of looking stupid by admitting I didn't know something, that I thought everyone knew – except me. It was only when I developed enough courage to mention some of the things I needed help with, that I found there were dozens of people in similar situations – we all needed help and we could help each other.

So the next time you feel stuck, not skilled enough to complete a task, and frustrated at your perceived incompetence – be courageous. Speak up, ask for help and become a role model for so many people, too afraid to ask for what they want. Always remember it's okay to ask for help.

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4 keys to get the order without being pushy

BY ROBYN HENDERSON

It's a known fact that many people do not want to be sold to. Even those people who actually walk into a shop looking for something to purchase, visit a website and seek information or meet a stranger at a networking event. No one enjoys the heavy sell and for many, irreparable damage can be done without the sales person being remotely aware. So let's look at 5 keys to ensuring you get your next order without being pushy.

1. Communicate Clearly

This includes both the spoken and the written word. Make sure your language is jargon-free. Talking about CRMs, ROIs, B2Bs, SMEs, etc. can be totally acceptable in a specific institute or association where this language is commonly used. However, it can be seen as confusing, annoying and sometimes quite intimidating at networking events. People outside your industry or profession don't have a clue what you are talking about. If they are polite, they may in fact ask what does the jargon means, so that your story has some relevance to them. But most remain confused. And even if they were a prospect, they are unable to identify that for themselves. The result for you is of course a missed opportunity and no sale. You may like to think of your communication with others as being like building a bridge between two people. The more we communicate, the more they understand where we are coming from, the more trust we build, the stronger the connection becomes.

TIP: Avoid using professional jargon outside of your industry network.

2. Act Like The Host And Not The Guest

Sometimes people feel quite awkward attending a networking event, which is supposedly filled with prospects and potential referees. All they are seeing as they enter the room is a sea of strange faces. Master networkers always act like the host and not the guest. In a nutshell, they often approach people who are standing alone and looking a little shy and introduce them to others. Good networkers also have a genuine interest in meeting new people and connecting them with like minded people. By taking the focus off you and putting it on to the person you are speaking to, you are bound to learn something new. Not to mention expand your network

TIP: At networking events, don't let your comfort zone become a cage.

3. Listen, Listen, Listen

Master networkers are great listeners. They listen with their heart as well as their ears. Within the Chinese symbols for listen, is a character representing the word "king". What would happen if we practised listening unconditionally as if the person who we're listening to was a king and had our total respect. You may believe that people must first earn respect, rather than just be given it. However, if we want to stand out from our competitors, why not practise listening as attentively as possible.

TIP: Listen with your ears as well as your heart.

4. Always Follow Up

There are actually three parts to attending a networking event:

- a. Preparation prior to the event
- b. Attending the function
- c. Following up after the event

Most people just show up, often unprepared, with no strategy, no business cards and basically no idea of what they want from the event—other than the magic word BUSINESS. Many people also overcommit that they will send something "this afternoon", "tomorrow", "asap" only to find that unexpected events have taken them away from that task. I have learned through my mistakes that it is better to under promise and over deliver. Sometimes people need things urgently—often a brochure, profile or even an email, that we have broken our necks to get to them, which may sit for days or even weeks before they get to it. Smart networkers allow themselves time post event to follow up. They know that doing what they say they are going to do, within a specified time frame is critical to building their credibility with a potential client or referee. Always ask the question, "When would you like to receive this information?" Most often, the response will be "whenever you have time."

TIP: Don't overcommit and promise things within a time frame that you know will put pressure on you. Allocate 15 minutes per day follow up time after attending networking events.

Hold on, we didn't mention anything about closing, or getting the sale. That's right, we didn't. My experience tells me, that if you consistently work on the four keys above, you too won't have to ask for the sale. Your customers will become advocates quickly and effortlessly. And when your name is mentioned, they will describe you as "really easy to understand", "very professional", "always follows up", "really listens to me and my situation and makes me feel special". And of course, the magic words: "here's his phone number, I recommend him. You'll enjoy doing business with him too, I always do." With leads like that, who needs to close a sale?

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"it is better to under promise and over deliver"

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Strong Communicators Make Great Networkers

BY ROBYN HENDERSON

GOLDEN RULES FOR TONGUE TIED NETWORKERS

Personality and an ability to communicate clearly are prerequisites of networking, however, communication skills can be learned and everyone has the perfect personality for networking. The ability to listen more than you speak is actually the key to great conversation. Mastering the art of conversation can help you to become a more effective networker. Some people arrive at a networking function and leave their personality at the venue doorstep. They are unable to start or finish conversations and usually have a miserable time. They leave the event vowing never to return and to avoid those networking events at all costs. However, back in their comfort zone, they can express opinions on just about anything and rarely allow themselves to feel intimidated by anything or anyone.

“aim to have
a quality
heart to heart
connection”

So we may surmise that it is actually our nerves and fear of meeting strangers that sometimes gets the better of us at these events. Some people are so nervous making conversation with strangers that they don't listen at all. Rather they concentrate on what their next question will be and as a result the conversation does not flow.

Therefore to improve your networking skills, it will help dramatically if you work on improving your conversation skills.

HABITS OF SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATORS

Think about some of the better communicators in your networks. What makes them different? Is it that they:

- listen to your answer
- allow you to finish your response without interrupting
- make eye contact
- genuinely act as if they do care about your answer
- somehow make you feel special
- follow up when they say they will
- offer helpful suggestions to you, but not in a know-it-all fashion
- remember snippets of previous conversations you may have had
- Be friendly.

There are other strangers in the room feeling just as nervous and uncomfortable as you do right now. Trust me on this. You too can adapt these communication habits, when you next attend a networking event. Always remember –

- Make eye contact with the person you are speaking to.
- Smile, smile, smile. Smiling is a universal language and loosely translates to – I am smiling because I want to be your friend – I am not going to hurt you – smile back and we can start a conversation.
- Breathe deeply often. When you are nervous you often breathe shallowly and this perpetuates the nervousness. If you take a number of deep breaths (breathe in for the count of two, out for the count of two) at least five times – you will find your whole body relaxes and you become more focussed on being present and in the moment. Whenever you start to feel stressed or nervous, breathe deeply. The great thing is – no one knows what you are doing. All they will notice is that you become more involved in the conversation.
- * Make heart to heart connections. When we make that heart to heart connection, we listen actively to the conversation. We don't have to worry about what we are going to say next, because when we are listening we receive lots of cues for responses or more questions. Often if we are quiet long enough we can even learn lots of things. However, when we are nervous, we fill the conversation with endless chatter and then mentally beat ourselves up for boring everyone.

Successful networkers prepare PRIOR to attending a networking event. Think of a series of open-ended questions that cannot be answered by only yes or no. These questions will help to draw the other person into a meaningful conversation. Feel free to change the language to suit your own personality and jargon. If by chance you befriend someone who does not want to join in your conversation, that's okay, at least you extended the hand of friendship. Don't take rejection personally at networking events. Often the person who rejected you is even more nervous than you are, believe it or not!

If all of this conversation-making still sounds a little bit daunting, take heart. Every day aim to have a quality heart to heart connection, even for only 60 seconds, with someone who crosses your path. Maybe it will be the newsagent, the garage attendant, bank teller, supermarket check out operator— basically any stranger you come into contact with. Ask a general question and listen to the answer with your heart, not your head. See how easily the conversation flows. Don't be surprised if soon you are receiving compliments about being a great conversationalist. Trust me, with a little practice you will start to see yourself as the interesting person that other people see you as. Strong Communicators Make Great Networkers

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5 Networking Mistakes People Make

BY ROBYN HENDERSON

People often miss networking opportunities basically because they are not prepared. Failing to plan they say, is planning to fail. So let's look at the 5 main networking mistakes people make.

1. No Business Cards

Picture yourself having a frantic day at work, you dash to the networking function only to find you have forgotten your business cards. Even if you meet "Ideal Prospect No 1" at this event, writing a phone number on a serviette or coaster is bound to give the wrong impression.

Solution: Place business cards NOW in your wallet, car and pockets of all your suits. Never ever attend a networking event without business cards.

2. Network Only At Business Networking Events

Many people see networking as something that they just do at specific business networking events. They attend a Chamber of Commerce event and network then on their return to their office, they stop networking. Next month back to the Chamber and they are networking again. Rather than considering the unlimited networking opportunities that may crop up at their social, cultural or sporting groups. People want to do business with people they know, like and trust. Who do they trust more than the person they play touch football, tennis or run with? Some people think it is inappropriate to mix business and pleasure. As a result, they continually become annoyed with their peers when they learn they have gone to a competitor to provide a service they personally could have offered.

Solution: Master networkers see networking as a life skill not just something they do when they want something. Consider viewing networking as a skill that you live 24 x 7. Start by treating people the way you want to be treated. In Asia business cards are called name cards. If we think of our business cards as name cards, this takes a huge amount of pressure away from the giving of cards. When you give a card to a friend or new contact, whether it is in a business or social setting, you may say "Here's my card, if I can ever help any of your friends just give me a call." In this way you are not putting pressure on them at all.

3. Keeping Score—Cards

Poor networkers keep scorecards on the favours they do for others. "I gave a lead to Fred last month and he still owes me big time." With this attitude they will never expand their networks and this attitude could cripple your friendship with Fred. You see, Fred may never be in a position to give you a lead, however, through your help, he has been able to help another person, who helps another and so the chain of networking grows. It is not about one-for-one favours. One of the universal laws at the basis of networking is to give without expectations—treat people the way you would like to be treated.

Solution: Iven Misner, founder of BNI (Business Networking International, a breakfast referral group) says "Give without remembering and receive without forgetting." If you are still a little sceptical, why not adapt this philosophy for the next 30 days and just see what happens—you may be pleasantly surprised with the outcomes!

4. Don't Talk To Strangers

Your mother told you when you were a small child, not to talk to strangers. Now when you attend a business or social networking event, the room is filled with strangers and you still follow your mum's advice. One of the worst mistakes people make when networking is to attend a networking event with three or four of their workmates and sit or stand with them all night. Because you know them well and feel comfortable in their company, why would you bother to move out of your comfort zone and talk to a stranger who may not even end up being a prospect?

Solution: Move out of your comfort zone!! By all means arrive with one or two peers. However, prior to arriving discuss your strategies for the night and agree that you will definitely circulate and aim to meet new people within say ten minutes of your arrival. Your individual aim may be to have a quality conversation with three or four people and you will not reconnect with each other until you have done so. If someone in the group is not overly confident, take them under your wing and show them how it's done.

5. Don't Value Yourself

Many young networkers are mixing at business events with people who are sometimes 10 and 20 years older than them. Alternately they could be around the same age group, but have more experience in this specific industry. They instantly feel at a disadvantage, consider they have nothing to contribute because they are not as experienced in their profession and virtually clam up when it comes to conversation. Even worse, if the subject comes round to a topic they know something about, they spend so much time filtering their own thoughts about whether their comment is even worth mentioning, that they end up having a miserable time and miss many opportunities.

Solution: Start valuing yourself today. You deserve to be at the event, you have bought your ticket, as have they. Although you may be younger or less experienced, don't let that stop you expressing an opinion. Prepare a couple of questions prior to arriving. Interesting people are interested in others—that's what makes them interesting. You have many life experiences that are of equal value to anyone in the room; today you just don't think they are. When you value and respect yourself, others do the same.

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"Move out of your comfort zone!!"

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Networking Sins to Avoid

BY ROBYN HENDERSON

People often offend others and never know it. When you are new to attending networking events it is so easy to unknowingly make a mistake and jeopardise a business building opportunity. So let's look at some of the definite networking sins to avoid.

- If you have booked to attend an event and then find you cannot attend on the day, send a replacement. Most organisers are charged for no-shows and most will send you an invoice for your non-attendance. NEVER no-show and then refuse to pay for your ticket especially if you begged the organiser to save you a place and said you would definitely be there. No excuse if you got a better offer. Put yourself in the host's shoes.
- Remember to turn off your mobile phone during the function. There is only one thing worse than a great speaker being interrupted by a phone or pager, and that's when the person answers the call and starts to have a loud conversation. This is a really quick way to turn the whole group against you. Besides, it's very rude.

- If you are a smoker check the rules on smoking inside the function. Most functions these days have designated smoke free zones.

- Don't go unprepared. Do your homework on the group you are attending. Know something about their history, their mission, how long they have been operating.

"Don't act like a shark!"

- If you just want a meal go to a restaurant. Don't waste the time of serious networkers who are looking to grow their businesses. Decide prior to booking what you want to get out of attending each particular function.
- Don't join a group the first time you attend. Attend at least two meetings before you officially join any group. Get to know some of the people, let them get to know you. If it is not your perfect fit, move on. There are unlimited networking groups starting up all the time. Find the one that suits your requirements.
- Once you do join attend regularly. The more people see you, build rapport with you and start to develop trust with you, the more business you will generate. Don't be an inactive member who never attends events and then complains that the network was a waste of time or money because no business was generated from it.
- Don't be discourteous. Excuse yourself politely if you find the people you are speaking to do not interest you or, more importantly, do not appear to be interested in you. Look for a friendly face and introduce yourself to someone else.
- Don't arrive late unless it simply cannot be avoided. Plan always to arrive on time. Latecomers arriving with two friends and expecting to sit together can be disappointed when they find only single seats left. The organisers will certainly remember

you negatively if you demand to sit together when that can only be done by reseating others.

- If you arrive early and the organisers are not quite ready, please don't complain. You don't know what has caused the delay for them—possibly the hotel had a late room turnaround and this may have caused the delay. Offer assistance to the host. Maybe you could meet and greet visitors, assist with the registration desk, put out brochures. The host may decline your offer, but they will definitely remember you.

- If you don't enjoy the guest speaker's presentation, don't decide to give your own presentation at your table and start a loud conversation in competition with the speaker. Pay the speaker and host the compliment of being courteous

- Don't swear or blaspheme — this is inappropriate behaviour.

- Don't treat the ten-second self-introduction as a two minute commercial. People will switch off and you will leave a negative impression.

- Unless you are the host you do not have to speak to everyone in the room when there are more than twenty people attending. Do not 'work' the room. Rather have a small number of quality conversations with the people who cross your path. Leave a positive image with these people and they will spread the word for you.

- Don't leave early unless it is absolutely necessary. Some of the best networking opportunities happen when you arrive early and leave late.

- Don't act like a shark. I am sure you have seen people who 'work the room' by prowling around reading the name tags only, never making eye contact until they find a victim. Then they pounce. These people are so obvious; most people can see through their behaviour and avoid them at all costs.

- Don't forget the golden rule in the networking environment—we earn the right to gain business by doing something for someone else first.

- Don't expect people to place an order with you just because you introduced yourself to them. You must earn the right to gain their business.

- Don't drop names of people that you don't know and pretend you do. The networking world is very small. You can be caught out quickly. At the same time do not bad-mouth others. You are sure to offend someone in the group.

- Don't lie about anything. Trust is critical in the networking environment. If you are caught out with a lie you will do irreparable damage to your reputation.

- Don't jump in when there are pauses in conversation. Pauses are fine—let the other person jump in first, maybe they are thinking about their answer.

KEY POINT. You never know who the person you are chatting to might be connected to. To date, I have never seen anyone wearing a sign saying, Be really nice to me because although I don't look important to you right now, I am going to introduce you to your next largest client.

At networking events always treat people the way you would like to be treated.

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If You Are Not Having Fun, You Are Not Doing It Right

BY ROBYN HENDERSON

Talking to strangers ranks in the top 5 things that people hate to do. And to think of actually having fun whilst talking to strangers may be a definite stretch of your imagination. Recall the last party that you went to and picture those people in the room, who just seemed to be able to talk to anyone about anything. Just what is their secret and how come they even look like they are enjoying themselves? Is it possible for you to become a more interesting person this year and even have fun talking to total strangers? The answer is most definitely YES!!

TIP 1 Interesting people are interested in others. They actually take the focus off themselves and put it on to the person/s they are speaking to. Interesting people are great listeners—they work at improving their listening skills every day.

Whilst waiting for a delayed flight, I once had a 20-minute conversation with a businessman. During that time, I spoke less than 50 words to him, as I asked about his work, family, last holiday and his next holiday. This interesting man chatted away in response to my questions, never once using my name or asking me a question. As his flight was called, he looked at my business card (obviously to get my name as he had not used it once) and said, “Robyn, you would have to be one of the most interesting people I have ever met.” Interesting or interested? Master networkers know that they can learn much more from listening than they can from speaking.

TIP 2 Spend a week observing great communicators in your social and business networks.

What makes them different? You may observe that they:

- Listen to your answer
- Allow you to finish your response without interrupting
- Make eye contact
- Genuinely act as if they do care about your answer
- Somehow make you feel special
- Follow up when they say they will
- Often offer helpful suggestions to you, but not in a know-it-all fashion
- Can often remember snippets of previous conversations you may have had with them

Great communicators work at their conversations. They focus on you, not the person standing behind you. The good news is that everything they do, you can choose to do too.

TIP 3 Act as if everyone in the room, stranger or not, is a V.I.P.—a very interesting person. Good communicators have a belief system that every single person that they meet is incredibly interesting and has much to contribute to any

conversation. An interesting person will almost always have a couple of open-ended questions prepared, e.g.

- What was the highlight of your day/weekend/holiday?
- What tips would you give someone who has never attended one of these events before?
- What’s your opinion of...?
- What do you like most about your profession?
- What’s your favourite restaurant, movie, sport?
- Your ... looks great, do you mind me asking where you bought it?
- Are you XXXX(city) born and bred?
- How did you get your start in the widget business?
- What tips would you give someone entering your profession?

Once the conversation starts, it generally flows, when you focus on making that heart to heart connection—and really listening to the responses and of course their questions. Treat the person standing in front of you as if they were the most important person in the room.

TIP 4 Act like the host and not the guest. The key to making connections is basically that you are treating people the way you would like to be treated. If a stranger walked into the room, what would they be hoping someone in the room would do? Befriend them of course. So the next time you see a person standing alone and possibly looking a little nervous or out of place, talk to them. “Hi, my name is Robyn, mind if I join you?” or even better, catch their eye and invite them to join your group. They rarely decline your offer, why would they?

TIP 5 Practice, Practice, Practice If talking to strangers still sounds a little bit daunting, take heart. Every day aim to have a quality heart to heart connection, even for only 60 seconds with someone who crosses your path. Maybe it will be the newsagent, the garage attendant, bank teller, supermarket check out operator—basically any stranger you come into contact with. Ask a general question and listen to their answer with your heart, not your head. Then see how easily the conversation flows.

Don’t be surprised if pretty soon you are receiving compliments about being a great conversationalist and most importantly, you will also find yourself having fun.

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“Act like the host and not the guest”

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5 Keys to Systemising your Networking

BY ROBYN HENDERSON

Thousands of dollars are spent every year on attending networking functions, special events and forums, but how do you know what is the best use of your networking time and effort.

The networking bottom line is:

EFFORT = TIME + MONEY + ENERGY

So let's look at how much time, money and most importantly energy do I have to expend on networking to achieve rewards for my effort.

1. Know What You Want

The more specific you are, the more chance you have of achieving your targets. Many people attend networking forums looking for business. And when asked specifically, what sort of clients are you looking for, the response is usually—anyone, I am just looking for business. Basically people do want to help other people and the more specific you are, the more chance they have of assisting you.

The clearer you are in your mind, prior to attending the event, the more chance you have of turning business cards into business. You may be looking for clients with 50 plus staff and a turnover of \$10 million. Alternately, a home based business with 1-2 staff may be your target market. Practice describing what your ideal client looks like. This may include their specific

industry, staffing levels, their target market, their requirements for your product or service.

2. Do Your Research

Identify as many players as possible in your target market. Their company names, locations, diversification, whether they are part of a global organization, Australia produced products—it's very important to do your homework on your ideal client. Identify your competitors, who is currently supplying your product or service to your target market. Do they provide a better or a poorer product or service than you do? What are their strengths and weaknesses? You may be saying to yourself, this is irrelevant, I just want to sell my products. However, if you don't know what you are competing with, you don't know where you stand in the market place.

3. Know How Others Can Help

Once you are very clear on point one and two, you then need to look at your own network, both personal and business.

Identify whom you can approach to form a strategic alliance. This alliance will be based on a win/win arrangement—formal or informal, where both parties benefit—either financially or strategically. If this connection is not based on a win/win arrangement it will be short lived and more than likely damage your reputation or theirs. If you feel your network is not strong enough to forge alliances with, you may then need to look at your personal networks and identify “connectors”—people who can introduce and connect you with people in your target market. This could be done on a formal basis—setting up a meeting where you invite the key stakeholders. Or informally where you introduce someone via email, phone call or invite both parties to join you at a networking event, arrange a game of golf, or another social event. Your decision on a formal or informal introduction would be determined by the level of familiarity with the two parties. The stronger the friendship, possibly the less formal the connection/engagement would need to be.

4. Earn The Right To Ask The Favour

Networking is a two way situation. Earn the right to ask the favour by offering help to others as well as asking for it. Revenue enhancement is a phrase coined in the States. Basically it means—enhancing your client's revenue. The easiest way to do that is to generate regular referrals for your clients. Having identified your possible “connectors”, you may also like to list people who they would be interested in meeting and potentially doing business with. And so it goes...the law of reciprocity in motion—when what you give away, comes back tenfold. You give away referrals and you receive referrals. You connect potential allies clients together and before you know it, you are connected to the perfect strategic alliance for you.

5. Know The Odds

The more total effort you expend, the greater are your chances of networking success. Fifteen minutes per day devoted to strategic networking time is a valuable investment of your time. Can't spare fifteen minutes per day, ask yourself, what am I doing that doesn't really have to be done? What am I doing that could be delegated? If I identify networking as an income building activity, how much time am I committing to building and ultimately ensuring the growth of my future income, business, career prospects and potential alliances.

NO NETWORKING = NO EFFORT = NO RESULTS

Smart networkers understand that networking is a life skill, not just something you do when you want something. Life is filled with strategic alliances, socially we often refer to them as friends. People who are there when we need them or vice versa. The networking we do socially is in fact no different to the networking we do in business. The basis of networking anywhere, is to treat people the way you would like to be treated.

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“networking is a life skill, not just something you do when you want something.”

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GLOBAL NETWORKING: It's not what you know, it's who knows, what you know

BY ROBYN HENDERSON

Picture yourself in a boardroom with 8 women in Australia looking at a double television screen. On one screen is a picture of the Sydney boardroom, on the other screen a picture of a boardroom in Toronto Canada, where another 10 women are set to do business internationally. Wow—the joys of technology.

“Would you like to be part of a virtual trade mission between Canada and Australia?” Never one to miss an opportunity, I agreed and then asked the question—what is a virtual trade mission? Boy was I in for a steep learning curve.

Background:

A group of very innovative women based in Canada had set up a virtual trade mission with the support of sponsors including the Royal Bank of Canada, Austrade, Westpac Banking Corporation, Industry Canada, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. The former national manager of Westpac Women in Business, Amanda Ellis had formed a core group of women in Sydney late last year to launch O.W.I.T.: Overseas Women into Trade, initially to facilitate trade with women in Canada and Australia. I was fortunate to be invited to participate in this core group. Our first task was to register online with our electronic profile: www.dfaitmaeci.gc.ca/trade/missions/oltm/auscan (If you are also looking to export to Canada, you are welcome to also register online). Once registered, we then became part of a Yahoo list serve, which was a great way of getting everyone communicating with each other on line, prior to the VTM. The next step was the virtual trade mission. The Australian Technology Park in Sydney has the latest state of the art video conferencing equipment and this was our venue for the inaugural Virtual Trade Mission.

Major Networking Opportunity:

After the formal introductions and welcomes, we took turns describing our businesses and what we were wanting help with from our overseas counterparts. Without exception, each request from Canada or Australia was met with a definite, “you need to speak with XYZ” or “I have a friend who will know someone in that field”, or “the website xyz will have answers for you.” Without exception every one of these woman was connected with a potential strategic alliance or directed to where the ally could be sourced. And we had businesses represented as diverse as heart valve producers, compost bin manufacturers through to filmmakers.

Now, in all my years of networking, this was definitely one of the most powerful demonstrations of “it's not what you know, it's who knows, what you know.”

And it got me thinking how powerful it would be on a daily basis if we actually asked for help with the things we needed, rather than trying to solve things ourselves. In less than 90 minutes 19 people literally had doors open for them in other countries, purely by being succinct and direct with their requests for help.

The final step was, of course, taking action and following up with those leads.

I was asked to give a brief outline of the points that I thought were absolutely critical to ensure the maximisation of any potential strategic alliances. You may like to consider the following key points with any national or international alliances you are considering:

1. Be specific: the more information you give, the easier you make it for people to help you.
2. Be prepared to start small and prove your worth to a potential client, prospect or ally.
3. Never assume anything. There may be differences in language/customs. Confusion may occur if you do not clarify everything. Assume nothing.
4. Ask yourself: how much are you prepared to lose or invest in terms of time and money to make this VTM work? Without commitment you won't get your return on investment (ROI)
5. Once you form a connection, set specific time lines on how, when, who, where, why and how much will be done by a specific set time.
6. Allow for exit clauses. If you have made a connection with a potential client/ally, plan a task that needs to be completed by a set (realistic) time frame. If step one does not happen by that time (without a reasonable explanation), then you may consider suggesting possible exit clauses for both parties. When you value your worth others will too.
7. Always work win-win. If it's not win-win it will not work long term.
8. Ask yourself: Why am I doing this? Will this opportunity take me one step closer to my goals or further away. Be clear on your intention, then make the commitment to make it work for you.
9. Aim for quality alliances not quantity. Establish alliances one at a time. Trying to manage dozens will result in confusion for you and your potential allies.
10. Imagine building a bridge from one country to the other. With every alliance we make that bridge becomes stronger and stronger for everyone.

Measuring Success

At the conclusion of our 90-minute link up, the virtual trade mission was hailed as a HUGE success. The measure of success would ultimately be determined by who followed up in a timely fashion and maximised these golden opportunities.

Start Your Own Mastermind Group

Don't wait to be asked to join a mastermind group—why not start your own. Handpick a group of like minded people, set up a meeting, be clear and specific on your outcomes and wait for the magic to happen. It won't take long for you to see the power of networking.

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“Always work
win-win!”

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business ideas from a new perspective

The Power of Mastermind Groups

BY ROBYN HENDERSON

One of the biggest challenges people face today is the shortage of unbiased, knowledgeable people to bounce ideas around with. What we are often looking for is a devil's advocate—someone who challenges our thinking, while supporting us, whilst stretching us to think beyond our self imposed limitations.

Many smart networkers have clicked into the power of creating a regular mastermind or brainstorming group. They use this group as a sounding board for new ideas, innovations, business challenges and in many cases informal mentorship. And when it's well planned and organised, it can be a win-win for all the mastermind members, not just you. Good planning is critical, so let's look at a seven-point checklist for setting up a successful mastermind group:

1. Every mastermind group needs a driver—an organiser. Since it's your idea, you automatically become the organiser. You will firstly want to decide what you want to achieve from the mastermind group. Make a list of at least 5 things you would hope to achieve from regular meetings with a specific group. You may also consider the option of holding irregular mastermind meetings, where you come together with a specific need at a specific time.

2. Next, list 10 things that you have to offer a potential mastermind group—dig deep here, maybe you can create business connections, introduce potential prospects, cross-network your suppliers, provide the venue, the refreshments, the transport, not to mention your expertise—ideally if you have potentially four members—each will contribute different things.

TIP: Don't overcommit with your list—be realistic about time, money and energy.

3. Now you need a list of prospective members for the group—people you know and trust, people who ideally work outside your profession or industry. This will ensure that they can give you ideas with fresh eyes, rather than the 'this is how we've done it for years' attitude. As you may encounter rejection from some of these potential members, it is best to list at least 10 people as prospective members. You are looking for 4–5 people with similar values and ethics. They may have different ways of thinking and expressing themselves, but they are known to be honest, reliable, professional and good communicators.

4. Create a time line of when you will make contact with the prospects; when you will prepare a brief outline of what outcomes you hope to achieve with the group; when you will

meet for the first time; meeting time that suits most people; and trial period time frame. Basically you are preparing your mastermind plan that you will present to the prospects. The more prepared you are, the more your prospects will be inclined to say yes.

5. Work out your ROI—return on investment for the group. Let's look at potentially meeting with this group twice a month for 1 hour.

- Meeting time 1 hour
- Travel to and from venue 2 hours
- Action to be taken post event say 2 hours
- Total 5 hours per meeting x 2 meetings per month

We are looking at 10 hours per month x 11 months (allowing for holidays)

Total = 110 hours.

Now your charge out rate may be \$250 per hour multiplied by 110 hours = \$27,500 (adjust your charge out rate to suit your fee)

At a charge out rate of \$250 per hour, this mastermind group is potentially going to cost you \$27,500 in the next 12 months plus 2.75 weeks of your time (working on a 40 hour per week rate)

TIP: Now do you see why it's important to take the time to plan the mastermind group, set rules, make people accountable and to choose wisely. Is every person on the list worth 2.75 weeks of your time in the next 12 months?

6. At this point in time, many mastermind groups do not proceed as the organiser throws in the towel, deeming it to be all too hard and they don't have that much time to spare. If that is the case, consider reducing the meetings to once a month, for a longer time. Constantly be aware though of your ROI; aim for quality mastermind groups not quantity.

7. After preparing a 1–2 page summary of your mastermind outline, make contact with your mastermind prospects and ask if you can forward the outline to them. Make sure to include the first proposed meeting date. Don't take it personally if they reject your offer—better to have an early rejection than an overcommitted participant.

TIP: Never assume anything. Clarify everything; don't be afraid to state the obvious. If you treat your mastermind group as a business relationship, nurture it, make regular contact in between meetings and think regularly of ways to enhance this relationship, your ROI will far outweigh the initial effort required to put this powerful network together.

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“be realistic about time, money and energy.”

How to network your way to your next board appointment

BY ROBYN HENDERSON

It's not what you know—it's who knows what you know! Why do we continue to see the same names popping up on boards throughout Australia and New Zealand? What do these people know, that the people wanting to secure board seats don't know? Is there a shortage of opportunities? Well, you only have to read the financial pages to see the highs and lows of board members and chairmen alike. One thing for certain is that you have to be visible, a strong decision maker, be prepared to make the tough calls and undergo public scrutiny.

So have you got what it takes to get on a board? Lets look at three key areas that may assist you to secure your first or next board appointment.

1. Be Prepared To Ask For Help

Identify all the people in your network who are currently on boards or have held board seats in the last five years. Highlight the names of those people you would feel comfortable phoning and asking for a ten-minute phone meeting. Now you might be thinking you would prefer to take that busy person to lunch or dinner, and chat in a more relaxed manner. Maybe you give your contact that choice. But I can assure you it is no fun for the person being questioned as they try to eat a meal whilst being on the end of a barrage of questions. More often than not, their food goes cold, and it's not exactly a pleasant experience for them. And in this time poor society, you are probably not a major priority for them and let's face it; they can buy their own lunch any day. Yet asked courteously they will be more than happy to give you phone time. Your call might go something like this: "Mary, I am keen to get on a not-for-profit board in the charity area; I know you have been on XX board for sometime, and I was wondering if I could arrange a phone appointment with you to ask you three quick questions."

When your objectives are clearly explained, often you will receive your answers on the spot—which saves both of you time. However, if the appointment is confirmed, don't be surprised if it may be cancelled once or twice. Remember this is a priority for you, not for them.

2. Do Your Homework Before Your Phone Appointment

Be courteous enough to know as much about this person as possible. Know which boards they are currently on, the ones they may have resigned from and any challenges within the industries they currently represent. It could be considered a serious waste of their time if you have not bothered to research and prepare for the call. And this may reflect badly in the future, should they ever be asked to give you a reference or testimonial. Don't waste their time with stupid and obvious questions.

3. Be Specific With Your Questioning

Prepare your questions as succinctly as possible. Write them down and refer to the list as you go. Write notes, don't think you will remember everything—particularly if you are a little nervous—you are bound to forget something important. Be direct, but avoid confrontation. Remember, they are helping you and giving freely of their time. Your questions may include a brief background summary. With their agreement, you may even pre-send a brief resume and your questions a couple of days before the phone meeting. The busy person may not read your information word for word, but they are generally impressed with your professionalism. Your questions may include:

- How did you get your first board appointment?
- My situation is this: I am experienced in these areas; I am keen to get on boards in the YYY area; what should I be doing to increase my chances of being considered for a board?
- I have set a target of obtaining XX board appointments in the next XX years; is there anyone else you would recommend that I speak to, that may be able to offer a different perspective? And may I mention your name when I make contact with them?
- What have you found to be the biggest obstacles to getting onto boards?
- Is there a downside to being on a board?
- Other than a financial gain, what specific benefits have you experienced?
- If you were I, what would you do in the next 6–12 months to increase my chances?
- Final question—I am very grateful for your time, is there anything at all, in any area of your life that I could possibly help you with today? (Don't be surprised how simple a request you might receive at this time.)

"Is there a downside to being on a board?"

Be mindful of the time you have asked for—ten minutes—it is not your call to extend the time unless this is offered to you. Always, always, always send a thank-you note; thanking the person for their time and making reference to one or two points that you will be acting on. Remember also to keep them in the loop with your progress—this doesn't mean weekly calls, but it does include a quarterly update, either written or posted.

A wise person once said that your Network is your Network—this certainly applies when it comes to board appointments. Happy networking!

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10 Ways to boost Membership Effort = time+money+energy

BY ROBYN HENDERSON

Master networkers make great committee members – usually because they know lots of people. For this very reason you might be invited to form part of a committee for your peer group, association or institution. However, once you accept this invitation, you may find that membership is flagging, attendance is down and you have a tough job ahead of you.

As networking becomes the norm for business generation today, rather than the exception, more and more networks are springing up. And as there are a limited number of people attending any of these events, sometimes attendance is low, membership wanes and membership renewals often drop off. We also know that it takes as much effort to arrange a function for 50 people as it does to arrange one for 250.

So lets look at some practical, inexpensive ways of boosting membership and attendance to make the R.O.A. – (return on attendance) valuable, measurable and effective. More members = more networking opportunities.

1. NAME TAGS.

Always, always, always provide nametags. Reports show that 80% of the population forget names within 30 seconds of hearing them for the first time. To avoid this embarrassing situation, providing nametags with the names typed in approx. 32-point type will enhance networking opportunities.

2. COMMITTEE NAME TAGS.

Most committee members are volunteers, who give freely of their time. Providing a different nametag for committee members not only gives them recognition, but also makes it easy for first timers to know who to ask questions, find out information and seek guidance.

3. PROFESSIONAL EMCEES

A great emcee can make an event. Seeking out a professional from the ranks of your membership is an obvious solution. However, just because Jack Smith has been emceeing for 10 years, doesn't mean he is good at the job. Seek out a professional, who is a good communicator, can keep to time, is not sexist and has a general interest in the growth of the network.

Many professional emcees

may consider a contra for their services with a view to gaining exposure to your network.

4. PROMPTNESS.

It is important to reward the members and guests who arrived on time. Always start and finish your meetings on time. Starting late to accommodate late-comers is only rewarding negative behaviour.

5. MEETERS AND GREETERS

Are members who position themselves close to the registration area. Their job is to “meet and greet” guests, first timers and regular members with a smile and a self-introduction. Most of the fear associated with attending networks for the first time is specifically related to the first 10 minutes from arrival. A meeter and greeter takes the pain out of this process and can introduce first timers and new members to others with common interests.

6. ASK ME

Encourage some of your committee members to wear an ‘ASK ME’ badge or ribbon at meetings. This person will be acknowledged by the emcee and encouraged to mix and mingle throughout the event answering questions and providing information as needed.

7. LIST OF ATTENDEES.

Providing a list of attendees is a great way to facilitate networking during and post event. Including a person's name, company name and position with or without an email address, enables contact to be made post event. It's also a good idea to make a note on the list that confidentiality of this information is appreciated. As you meet people during the event, it helps if you highlight the person's name, to enable you to follow up more efficiently.

8. BUSINESS CARDS ON CORK BOARD.

As an alternate to the attendee list, some networks provide a double sized corkboard filled with pin tacks. As people arrive at the venue, they put a business card in the lucky door prize and then pin a second business card on the corkboard, which is located in a central area. In this way, you are able to see exactly who is in the room and the meeters and greeters can connect you with whomever you want to meet.

9. MEMBERSHIP FORMS AT MEETINGS.

Most networks want members, yet less than 50% of networks actually have membership forms on display at meetings. Such a simple thing that is often forgotten. Some networks say, “go to our website, we accept memberships on line”. That's fine, but why not have membership forms on hand to capture that potential member while they are hot!

10. TESTIMONIALS from happy members.

Often membership officers become a little tired of promoting memberships, even though it is their role. Why not invite one of your “advocates” to do the membership spot for you. By selecting enthusiastic, visible members, who attend regularly and asking them to say in 2-3 minutes what they have gained from membership is a far better advertisement for the group and again is an opportunity to give a member recognition.

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“A great emcee can make an event”

How much are you prepared to lose?

BY ROBYN HENDERSON

Strategic alliances are a success or failure largely based on the level of commitment from each key player. The critical question at the start of the potential strategic alliance formation is — How much are you prepared to lose? The loss may not necessarily be money, it may also include:

- the time commitment required to make the project happen
- the possible damage to either or both reputations or profiles if the project is unsuccessful
- time away from family and partners — how this is measured may vary from partner to partner

Some formal alliances may be based on short term pain for long term gain. Whereas an informal alliance with no pain or pressure on either party to commit, may end up with wishy washy or no results.

Lets look at ways of ensuring both formal and informal strategic alliances have the maximum chance of succeeding.

If we take the scenario of a group of peers brought together with a common interest brainstorming ideas of possible alliances. As with most brainstorming with open minded people, one idea feeds off another and there can often be an abundance of ideas. If you continue to brainstorm, you may take a simple idea and complicate it unnecessarily. Alternately, you may end up with so many ideas to choose from, it is difficult to decide which idea to prioritise as the number one strategy.

- Be direct — ask the question — how much are you prepared to invest \$\$ wise to make this idea happen. Money wise, \$500 to a millionaire is an indication of low to non existent commitment. However, \$500 from an out of work or low income partner is a sign of major commitment on their part. The investment can also be in time. How many hours can you commit to this project in the next 30 days? You want honest answers at this stage. Don't even start the project, unless you have the commitment of all players. Alternately reshuffle the deck and find new players.

- Do your homework — know enough about your potential allies situation to be able to gauge their level of commitment. Are they juggling too many balls in the air at present? Would this added commitment, cause them to drop one of the other balls? What are their priorities today?

If you are unsure, ask the specific question? — on a scale of 1–10, 1 being low, 10 being major impact — if our alliance falls over or fails, how much discomfort or hardship would that cause you or your business. If the answer is less than 5, you may look at renegotiating this initial commitment. If someone has absolutely nothing to lose with either a positive or a negative outcome, you will rarely gain full commitment from them. Why would they bother, they have absolutely nothing to lose win, lose or draw?

- Be prepared to defer the project to suit the potential players time availability. But only if you have their overall commitment. If not, seek alternate allies. Second choice may be exactly that — your second choice, but it may mean the project eventuates. Something that may not have happened with your first choice partner. When the hip pocket is hurting \$\$wise, the level of the commitment increases. Let's look at the increase in demand for personal trainers. An unfit person forms an informal or formal alliance with a professional fitness trainer and they form an agreement to increase their level of fitness to a certain level. If the unfit person cancels within 24 hours of their appointment or “no shows” — they pay. They only have to do this once or twice, to realise that they must honour their agreement or cancel the contract totally. Either way the personal trainer wins as they are working with committed clients, rather than time wasters.

- Be patient. If you are courting someone that you consider to be a “golden egg” for you or “jewel in your crown” — whichever description is most applicable, you must be very clear exactly what you have to offer the other party. Be as specific as possible and don't waste their time with compliments — they have heard it all before. It will also be helpful for you to know that rarely will a key player give you all of the “golden egg” in your first round of alliances. Why would they risk their good name in the marketplace with an untested player? Foolishly, many large alliances never happen, because the player with a lot less to offer, is reluctant to take on the small job/test alliance in the first place.

As they remain untested and have not proved their professionalism, reliability and commitment to the key player, “the golden egg” alliance will rarely be offered. Unless of course the marketplace shifts dramatically causing a rethink from the key stakeholder.

Finally, three things to ask yourself the next time you are invited to form partnership or alliance:

1. Will this alliance take me any closer to my major career or business goal?
2. Why are you doing this? — be very clear on your reasons and desired outcomes.
3. Lastly, how much in terms of \$\$ or time are you prepared to lose to make it happen.

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“how much are you prepared to invest \$\$ wise to make this idea happen?”

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Global networking specialist Robyn Henderson has spoken in 11 countries, presents over 150 times each year and has never advertised. All her work comes from networking, referrals and her website - www.networkingtowin.com.au.

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- How to Master Networking
- Network or Perish
- Networking Magic
- Be Seen, Get Known, Move Ahead
- What My Favourite Teacher Taught Me
- Masters of Networking
- Dare to Dream

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