

The untold benefits of Human Connections

In today's changing business world, there are some constants. Workers still have coffee breaks. Employees are still the foundation of every successful organisation. And effective networking is still the single most important factor in ensuring your continued success in your chosen career. If this is so, why do so many people fail to make the most of the networking opportunities that abound around them? An effective and successful network extends far beyond your company cafeteria. And this Christmas period, we all have the potential to tap into the limitless resources that the social and professional networking web can offer.

It's easy to work on your immediate workplace network. The water-cooler, the canteen, Friday night drinks. It actually takes surprisingly little effort. But don't fool yourself. This is not a network. These are your current colleagues. They comprise part of your network. Your full network, as the name suggests, extends far beyond the realms of your everyday interactions. Have you met that person who knows everyone? He is connected. He seems to know someone in every corporation. He knows small business owners. He knows CEOs. How does he do it? It's no big secret. There is some effort involved, but it isn't difficult to use all situations where you meet new people as an opportunity to build your network. You can build rapport in a matter of minutes, leading to the beginning of a new member of your network (and theirs). So how?

Firstly, you need to address your mindset. Do you enjoy meeting people? Are you interested in finding out about other people's interests? If the answer is no, you need to address this realisation. What is it about meeting new people that you dislike? Perhaps you identify with being shy? Maybe you find it difficult to have social conversations? Or are you just not able to see the point of the whole thing? Whatever your insight is, it's important to remember that if you are happy with these feelings, and satisfied with both the image that you project and your current success, there is no need to change anything.

However, if you are interested in feeling more relaxed and happy at social and professional functions, or you want to investigate the potential that is out there for you, read on.

If you are still reading, that means that you are ready for greater success. Effective and successful networking requires you to feel happy and comfortable in the situation you are in. This is because the people you meet need to enjoy meeting you. They need to remember you for all the right reasons. If you struggle to communicate effectively or pleasantly, or your nerves or lack of regard for the situation, change your normal professional or polite social behaviour, it will be more difficult to build an effective network. An effective network is one that works for you, to create opportunities and spread the word about your positive professional attributes and abilities. Its effectiveness requires that people feel positive about you, your attributes and your abilities.

How do you ensure that those you meet feel this positive energy towards you?

You need to feel positive about yourself and the situation that you are in at that moment. If you don't like who you are, or you feel out of your depth, uninterested or superior, it will be apparent to the astute outside observer. If you approach every situation with the potential of making a connection that could, in the future, serve to improve your life,

your mindset towards the meeting or function may shift somewhat.

So, this Christmas, experiment. Think of every professional interaction for the month of December as an opportunity to show who you really are and what you have to offer. How do you do that without talking about you the whole time? Rapport. To have it, you need to create it.

There are some tips on building rapport. It's important to know that all of the strategies associated with effectively building rapport are based around enjoying the company of others. You need to feel comfortable and help others feel comfortable. Here are some tips.

- Find common ground. Are they drinking the same drink as you? Did they order the same meal or something you've had in the past? Do they like something you like?
- Match and mirror. If they are talking fast, while you are spending two seconds on every individual word, chances are they'll be giving someone that "save me" look within 10 seconds. If they are using hand gestures, subtly mirror those.
- Use their name in the first three sentences you say to them following being introduced. This will help you remember their name. We all warm to someone who remembers us.
- Offer a compliment. Do you like their watch? Did you like the presentation they just gave? Were you impressed

with the documentation they sent? Interestingly, people remember you as nicer, younger and more attractive once you've paid them a compliment.

- Be positive. Not overbearingly so. Just the normal amount of enthusiasm for life, work and the surroundings. People are drawn to a happy person with a warm smile far more often than a cold, dreary individual.
- Be confident. Again, not arrogant. Just confident. If you are joining an existing group, avoid projecting that you don't want to be noticed. Smile, make eye contact and ensure that you use social cues to enter the conversation naturally.
- When you speak, hold your head high and your shoulders back. Make eye contact.
- Allow the other person more airtime. People generally prefer to talk, particularly about themselves. Let them. If they are socially aware, they will ensure they find out about you as well. But take the opportunity to find out about them, and at the same time, make them feel important.
- During a conversation, never look around for someone else to talk to or somewhere else to be. Ever.

- Find opportunities to make contact again. For example, ask for a small favour. If you liked their slides, ask for a copy. It's a lot less scary than "Hi, you don't know me but can I have your email address for my network?". Alternatively, make them some kind of offer, such as to share some slides, or an article, that may be of interest to them based on the conversation you have just had with them.

Follow up after you've met someone that you would like to add to your network.

- Make contact within 48 hours. Send an email, make a phone call or send a written note. Do not wait longer than that.
- Ensure you gain another reason to contact them once within the next two to four weeks. Ensure you are offering something of value to them so they can begin to see the value of adding you to their network.
- Link them into an ongoing communication system. Do you have a newsletter you can send out? Can you use their services regularly? Are you able to add them as an advisor or create a corporate partnership with them? Are there synergies that you may be able to tap onto over lunch? Give them a reason to continue to contact you.

Networking can be an enjoyable way to embrace new relationships with others or build on existing relationships. Opportunities to network abound. It may be the recruiter who calls you to investigate your interest in a job. It could be the person whom you found interesting at the dinner party last Friday night. It might be someone in your company, or a competitor company, at any professional level or any division. You never know when promotions or mergers will occur. And of course, it could be at the array of Christmas celebrations you will attend this month. Think more about your future, and less about the free wine at these celebrations, and you will be in a good position to maximise the opportunities that others, in their haze, may miss. 💡

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