



The Importance of Networking and Building Connections

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Webinar

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LAWYERS' PRINCIPLES OF PROFESSIONALISM

As a lawyer, I have dedicated myself to making our system of justice work fairly and efficiently for all. I am an officer of this Court and recognize the obligation I have to advance the rule of law and preserve and foster the integrity of the legal system. To this end, I commit myself not only to observe the Connecticut Rules of Professional Conduct, but also conduct myself in accordance with the following Principles of Professionalism when dealing with my clients, opposing parties, fellow counsel, self-represented parties, the Courts, and the general public.

Civility:

Civility and courtesy are the hallmarks of professionalism. As such,

- I will be courteous, polite, respectful, and civil, both in oral and in written communications;
- I will refrain from using litigation or any other legal procedure to harass an opposing party;
- I will not impute improper motives to my adversary unless clearly justified by the facts and essential to resolution of the issue;
- I will treat the representation of a client as the client's transaction or dispute and not as a dispute with my adversary;
- I will respond to all communications timely and respectfully and allow my adversary a reasonable time to respond;
- I will avoid making groundless objections in the discovery process and work cooperatively to resolve those that are asserted with merit;
- I will agree to reasonable requests for extensions of time and for waiver of procedural formalities when the legitimate interests of my client will not be adversely affected;
- I will try to consult with my adversary before scheduling depositions, meetings, or hearings, and I will cooperate with her when schedule changes are requested;
- When scheduled meetings, hearings, or depositions have to be canceled, I will notify my adversary and, if appropriate, the Court (or other tribunal) as early as possible and enlist their involvement in rescheduling; and
- I will not serve motions and pleadings at such time or in such manner as will unfairly limit the other party's opportunity to respond.

Honesty:

Honesty and truthfulness are critical to the integrity of the legal profession – they are core values that must be observed at all times and they go hand in hand with my fiduciary duty. As such,

- I will not knowingly make untrue statements of fact or of law to my client, adversary or the Court;
- I will honor my word;
- I will not maintain or assist in maintaining any cause of action or advancing any position that is false or unlawful;

- I will withdraw voluntarily claims, defenses, or arguments when it becomes apparent that they do not have merit or are superfluous;
- I will not file frivolous motions or advance frivolous positions;
- When engaged in a transaction, I will make sure all involved are aware of changes I make to documents and not conceal changes.

Competency:

Having the necessary ability, knowledge, and skill to effectively advise and advocate for a client's interests is critical to the lawyer's function in their community. As such,

- I will keep myself current in the areas in which I practice, and, will associate with, or refer my client to, counsel knowledgeable in another field of practice when necessary;
- I will maintain proficiency in those technological advances that are necessary for me to competently represent my clients.
- I will seek mentoring and guidance throughout my career in order to ensure that I act with diligence and competency.

Responsibility:

I recognize that my client's interests and the administration of justice in general are best served when I work responsibly, effectively, and cooperatively with those with whom I interact. As such,

- Before dates for hearings or trials are set, or if that is not feasible, immediately after such dates have been set, I will attempt to verify the availability of key participants and witnesses so that I can promptly notify the Court (or other tribunal) and my adversary of any likely problem;
- I will make every effort to agree with my adversary, as early as possible, on a voluntary exchange of information and on a plan for discovery;
- I will attempt to resolve, by agreement, my objections to matters contained in my opponent's pleadings and discovery requests;
- I will be punctual in attending Court hearings, conferences, meetings, and depositions;
- I will refrain from excessive and abusive discovery, and I will comply with all reasonable discovery requests;
- In civil matters, I will stipulate to facts as to which there is no genuine dispute;
- I will refrain from causing unreasonable delays;
- Where consistent with my client's interests, I will communicate with my adversary in an effort to avoid needless controversial litigation and to resolve litigation that has actually commenced;
- While I must consider my client's decision concerning the objectives of the representation, I nevertheless will counsel my client that a willingness to initiate or engage in settlement discussions is consistent with zealous and effective representation.

Mentoring:

I owe a duty to the legal profession to counsel less experienced lawyers on the practice of the law and these Principles, and to seek mentoring myself. As such:

- I will exemplify through my behavior and teach through my words the importance of collegiality and ethical and civil behavior;
- I will emphasize the importance of providing clients with a high standard of representation through competency and the exercise of sound judgment;
- I will stress the role of our profession as a public service, to building and fostering the rule of law;
- I will welcome requests for guidance and advice.

Honor:

I recognize the honor of the legal profession and will always act in a manner consistent with the respect, courtesy, and weight that it deserves. As such,

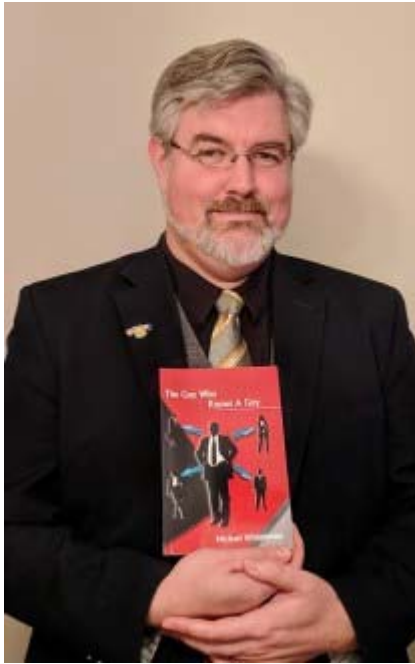
- I will be guided by what is best for my client and the interests of justice, not what advances my own financial interests;
- I will be a vigorous and zealous advocate on behalf of my client, but I recognize that, as an officer of the Court, excessive zeal may be detrimental to the interests of a properly functioning system of justice;
- I will remember that, in addition to commitment to my client's cause, my responsibilities as a lawyer include a devotion to the public good;
- I will, as a member of a self-regulating profession, report violations of the Rules of Professional Conduct as required by those rules;
- I will protect the image of the legal profession in my daily activities and in the ways I communicate with the public;
- I will be mindful that the law is a learned profession and that among its desirable goals are devotion to public service, improvement of administration of justice, and the contribution of uncompensated time and civic influence on behalf of those persons who cannot afford adequate legal assistance; and
- I will support and advocate for fair and equal treatment under the law for all persons, regardless of race, color, ancestry, sex, pregnancy, religion, national origin, ethnicity, disability, status as a veteran, age, gender identity, gender expression or marital status, sexual orientation, or creed and will always conduct myself in such a way as to promote equality and justice for all.

Nothing in these Principles shall supersede, supplement, or in any way amend the Rules of Professional Conduct, alter existing standards of conduct against which a lawyer's conduct might be judged, or become a basis for the imposition of any civil, criminal, or professional liability.

Networking

- I. Introductions
 - a. Michael Whitehouse – extrovert
 - b. Regina Graziani, Esq. – introvert
- II. Strategies for In-Person Networking Events (introvert and extrovert)
 - a. Givers Gain - approach networking with the intention of providing value
 - b. Unique Value Proposition - what do you have to offer other people to make their lives better?
 - c. They Don't All Know Each Other Already
 - d. The Power of Introductions
- III. How To and "Not" To Engage on Social Media
 - a. Build Bridges and Friendships in a Low-key Way Through Digital Connections
 - b. Everything Counts - no division between business and personal
 - c. Don't Share Memes - make your own arguments
 - d. Engage in Comments BUT Don't Get into the Mud
 - i. When in doubt: "Thank you for your opinion" or "It's clear you've put a lot of thought into this", etc.
 - e. Position as an Authority (but not as the expert) (Blog > Post > Comment)
- IV. Gaining Authority
 - a. Blog
 - b. Podcast
 - c. Video
- V. Leveraging digital networks
 - a. LinkedIn
 - b. Twitter
 - c. Facebook
- VI. Building networking relationships with non-peers
 - a. One to Ones
 - b. Follow Up - newsletters, social media, CRMs
 - c. Thank You Notes (digital and paper, yes paper)
- VII. Wrap Up and QUESTIONS

Faculty Biographies



Michael Whitehouse, www.guywhoknowsaguy.com

Author/Public Speaker, founder of The Crisis Control Group

In addition to his work as an author and speaker, Michael is the publisher of [Groton-Mystic Neighbors](#) in Mystic, CT, founder of [The Crisis Control Group](#), and Vice President of the [Groton Rotary Club](#). In 2014, Michael Whitehouse came to Groton, Connecticut knowing no one but his soon-to-be-wife, Michael has created a network of people around the area, across all industries and occupations. With the help of his connections, Michael has launched a local publication in Mystic, with two more in development. He has assisted in raising thousands of dollars for local charitable organizations. He has helped business people make connections, helped people find jobs, and helped people connect with skills and resources that they needed. Michael is not some kind of super networker. Rather, he simply developed some simple networking ideas that allowed him to engage with the community. It's all about connecting with people and finding a way to be of benefit to them.



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Regina C. Graziani, Esq. is the Program Director of the Paralegal Studies Program at the University of Hartford in West Hartford, Connecticut and co-chair of the Paralegals Section of the Connecticut Bar Association. Regina is admitted to practice before the courts of the State of Connecticut, the United States District Court, District of Connecticut, and the United States Supreme Court, and maintains a select private practice. Regina has taught and advised paralegals and paralegal students for over a decade. She presents regularly at national and regional conferences on various topics relevant to paralegals and the education of paralegals.

The Guy Who Knows a Guy

*Easy to learn networking strategies to help you
connect to your community, advance in business,
and lead a more fulfilled life.*

By Michael Whitehouse

Edited by Kendra Schou

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Forward

I love networking. I love being the guy who knows a guy. It's fun. It's good business. It lets me help people in ways I could not otherwise.

I decided to write this book because networking is an arcane art to many people. Often, people don't know how to get started. They don't think they have anything to offer and they don't know if they will be accepted.

In two years, I went from completely new in town to being well connected in business, non-profit, and political circles. I didn't do it with my great charm or talent. I did it by being dedicated to the networking process and through a set of techniques which anyone could follow. The purpose of this book is to share some of those techniques and to encourage everyone to network better.

You see, networking is not a zero sum game. Like a candle that loses nothing by lighting another candle, I don't gain some special advantage by networking that would be lost if everyone knew it. On the contrary, I want every single person I know to be able to build the kind of network I have. If everyone I knew had that kind of network, my own ability to find what I need and to help others would be even more greatly improved.

The original name of this book was to be "It's Not What You Know, It's Who You Know," but I felt that name was too cliché, so I tested out the new name "The Guy Who Knows a Guy" on various people I know and it was almost unanimously preferred. I have been referring to myself as the guy who knows a guy in a tongue in cheek way for many years. I use it because it is a simple expression that everyone instantly understands.

The only objection was that it had a male connotation, so I want to make clear that the only reason I use a male-connoted term is that it fits the colloquialism. "The Person Who Knows a Person" doesn't have the same ring to it. However, networking is absolutely for women and men alike. I network with women and

men equally, and have valuable networking relationships with people of all backgrounds and genders.

In fact, I would go one step further. It is very important that a networker maintains an open mind when meeting people. You never know who someone knows. To prejudge a person is to eliminate the chance to connect with their entire network. I have made some of the most valuable connections with some of the most unexpected people.

Everyone is connected to someone, and you can benefit from every acquaintance you make, so let's get out there and make some connections!

Chapter 1

Welcome to the Shoreline

When I walked into my first Business After Hours of the Eastern Connecticut Chamber of Commerce in March of 2014, my fiancée Amy was 5 months pregnant with our daughter Rowan. We had 30 days to find a new place to live, Amy had just started a new job, and I was trying to make a go of being a consultant, knowing almost no one in a 50 mile radius.

How did we end up in that predicament? Let's rewind 6 months.

In October of 2013, we had things well in hand. I was making the most money I had ever made in my life selling Volkswagens in Watertown, Connecticut. Amy, who was my girlfriend at the time, was a very successful leasing agent at a local apartment community. We were living together at the community she worked for and had been together for nine months.

Amy had been told by a doctor many years ago that if she did not have a child by the time she was 35, then it would be nearly impossible for her to conceive. In October of 2013, Amy was 34 years and 5 months old. Things were going well. We were financially stable. We got along well. We had compatible ideas on child rearing and how a household should be run. We thought it would be good to have a child together.

So, there we were, rational appraisal based on being in a good place with a couple of very well matched people. Stable relationship. Stable home. Stable income. By November, we were pregnant. Life was good.

In November, Volkswagen had flown me to Dallas to compete as one of the 20 best salespeople in America in a program called Retail Qualification Championship. Around this time, Amy's employer had changed management companies and her work was becoming increasingly stressful, which was very concerning in

light of the high risk pregnancy. We decided to take a short road trip to help relieve her stress.

I asked for two days off, a Monday and Tuesday, a month in advance. Afterall, I figured that the guy who was recognized as one of the top 20 salespeople in the country could take some *unpaid* time off. My employer did not agree and, after not giving me an answer until the last minute, told me that the time off was not approved and I should “think long and hard” before going on that trip.

I didn’t actually think very long or hard. Between my job and the health of my unborn child and her mother, I made the only sensible choice.

During that trip, I proposed to Amy, and she accepted, which was not a surprise since she had already agreed to have a child with me. We drove out through New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia. It was a beautiful trip.

I returned from the trip to be told that I no longer had a job. The way my employers had worded their warning to me about my trip turned out to work in my favor when it came time to apply for unemployment. Soon after, I took a job as a store manager that did not work out for reasons I will spare you from, but in the next few months, Amy’s job situation got worse, and she found a new job through some industry connections she had. Because our apartment was attached to her old job, we had 30 days to relocate. Fortunately, Amy had connections to a property manager in Groton whom she had worked for, and we had a place to move into.

The Business After Hours was the suggestion of Eric Lopkin, head of the Connecticut Business Connection¹, an organization that runs networking events around central Connecticut. I had been attending his events for some time, and when I mentioned I was moving, he suggested the Eastern Connecticut Chamber Business After Hours events.

¹ <http://www.connecticutbusinessconnection.org/>

At that very first Business After Hours (sometimes referred to as BAH) I met Kevin Brown, Chairman of the Mohegan Gaming Commission. He is a wonderful person and generally a good guy to know. Since then, I have come to know mayors, legislators, Chamber officials, and more business owners, authors, entrepreneurs, and influencers than I can count.

Since that time, I have gotten three jobs, all through networking connections. I have turned numerous customers into friends and friends into customers. I have been on the inside track of a number of interesting developments. I have been involved in making some very exciting things happen, but in March of 2014, 30 months prior to the writing of this book, I walked into a Business After Hours not knowing a single person in the room.

The purpose of this book is to share with you some of the techniques, mindsets, and concepts that I have used to develop my network, allowing me to better support both my family and the community.

It's not magic or some gift I was born with²³. It is simply the application of a strategy. It involves first having the right mindset: believing that you can build your network and approaching the process of networking from the desire to find ways to help others before yourself. It requires making networking a priority and finding the time for it. We will discuss this and much more in future chapters.

² Although being strikingly handsome doesn't hurt.

³ And, of course, great modesty.

Chapter 2

The Value of Networking

Or Why I Only Send Resumes When I Don't Want the Job

Before anything else, in order for networking to be effective for you, you have to believe that it has value. If you think of networking as something that you try to fit in when you have time around your more important work, then perhaps you do not quite understand the importance of it. Perhaps you have a career track and lifestyle for which networking is not crucial.

Much as I hate to say it, networking is more important for some people than others. If you work in sales, development, fund raising, recruiting, consulting, or similar fields, it is absolutely vital. But what if you work an administrative job? Does an engineer at Electric Boat need to network? What about an inside salesperson where customers call you?

Actually, I fibbed. Networking is important for everyone, but for some the importance is more readily apparent. If you are a salesperson or consultant, networking can be a vital source of prospects, without which you may find yourself unable to generate enough business to stay above water. But the engineer and the administrative assistant have their work provided for them, so developing a network is not necessary for their jobs.

But what if they are laid off? What if they need a lawyer in a rush? What if a tree falls through their garage?

I got my last three jobs through networking connections. For one of them, I had met the general manager of the dealership at a Business After Hours, and when it came time to upgrade my situation, I dropped by without an appointment and sat down with him for about thirty minutes. I was working for him the following Monday.

My previous primary employer when I wrote the first edition of this book had never seen my resume. I knew my

predecessor through the Eastern Connecticut Young Professionals, and I heard he was leaving, so I asked him to introduce me to the company owner. It turned out that was not even necessary because I knew the owner already, having done business with him. I emailed the owner a letter discussing my impression of what the job was and what my experience was and how it matched his needs. I got a call three hours later, had an interview the next week, and the job started shortly thereafter.

When I hear about people who have been out of work for two years, I am stunned. Unfortunately, I can completely understand why it happens. People have been fed a line of baloney that the way to find a job is to send out a whole bunch of resumes and... pray a lot, I guess.

You know what I do when I get frustrated with a job I'm working. Not so frustrated that I want to leave really, but frustrated enough that I need to do *something*? I go on Indeed.com, and I fire off a dozen resumes. Sometimes I even write nice cover letters. You know why I do this? Because it is a safe bet that none of these places will even call me back, let alone offer me a job. I send resumes through job sites to blow off steam, because that is all they are good for, feeling like you are doing something.⁴

Don't get me wrong. Some people do find jobs there, and if you have nothing else to do in your job search, certainly get a good resume together and blast it out to any job that looks promising. Unfortunately, it's like cold calling: something you do when you don't have any other leads.

However, when you get tired of just going through the motions, give me a call because there's a good chance I know someone who's hiring.

Let's say that your job is entirely secure. In that case, what would networking do for you?

⁴ In a later chapter, we'll discuss a powerful strategy to network your way to a job in 60 days.

Let's imagine that your friend comes to you and tells you that her husband has been abusing her and she needs a divorce lawyer right away. There are kids involved. There are financial complications. She needs someone that she can trust and she needs them now. What would you do?

This happened to me. And this friend was in the office of a highly qualified, trustworthy lawyer 18 hours later. The only difficulty I had was that I had to email three attorneys⁵ I knew well to find out which one was best suited to this kind of case.⁶

Had a computer disaster and need someone who can fix your computers in a hurry? I know a great company in New London who will take great care of you. Don't live near New London? I know an excellent one in the Amherst, Massachusetts area as well.

Do I sound like I'm bragging? Heck yeah, I'm bragging. But I'm not bragging to show off how much better I am than someone else. I am doing it for the much more noble reason of convincing you to keep reading. You can learn to do exactly what I did. Because this is not something that I gain a unique advantage at keeping to myself. The better connected everyone is, the better off everyone is. Imagine a world in which people could easily find new jobs or better jobs through their networks. Imagine if people could find the resources that they need quickly and easily through their networks. Imagine a world in which people simply knew numerous people in their local community and shared information, ideas, and simply looked out for each other.

That's what networking is about. It's a fancy, modern way of talking about community in a time when electronic devices, full schedules, and even the very way we get from place to place

⁵ Fun fact: the words lawyer and attorney are basically interchangeable.

⁶ Another fun fact: there are a whole lot of areas of law, and lawyers (or attorneys if you prefer) are not interchangeable. Just because you have a real estate attorney doesn't mean that they can also represent you in your divorce or personal injury case. (Who knew there were so many fun lawyer facts?)

conspire to prevent the community interactions that used to allow us to take care of one another.

It's not *what* you know, it's *who* you know, so let's meet some people.

Chapter 3

WIIFM

Or Everyone's Favorite Radio Station

There's a clever saying that some sales trainers use. They ask "What is everyone's favorite radio station?" The answer: WII-FM.

What's

In

It

For

Me?

People are infinitely interested in their own needs, wants and desires, and largely disinterested in yours. They don't care that your company needs to sell \$50,000 more this quarter or you won't be able to make payroll. They don't care that your daughter needs braces. They don't care that you haven't been able to make enough appointments this week. You could tell them these things, and they will respond in a thoughtful, concerned manner, but it will not make them one lick more likely to buy from you. It could even make them less likely to buy. After all, who wants to buy from a company that might turn the lights off next month or a salesman who isn't good enough to make enough money to take care of his family?

I always make it a point to separate my networking and my selling. If I am at a networking event or especially if we are doing a networking one-to-one, which I will go into great detail on later, I am there to learn about them, and, if I'm doing any selling at all, it is selling *through* rather than *to*. That's a BNI⁷ concept. You sell

⁷ BNI is Business Network International, an organization with chapters around the globe that allows their members to share leads and resources

through the group, not to them. You are giving them information so that they might refer others to you by knowing your advantages. So, that is what I'm always trying to do in a one-to-one. However, it has happened more than once that the person I am meeting with has a need which I can take care of for them, and they will basically ask me to sell them. While this is not strictly how networking should work, I never complain about it.

This happens because they are interested in their needs, and it happens that my solutions solve their needs.

Let me give you an example of something that I see violate the WIIFM concept all the time. If you are on social media, you have probably had a friend get into some sort of network marketing company⁸. They start making posts asking you to come to their virtual candle party or try their energy shake or look at their bag catalog, and the post will sound kind of like this:

Hey friends, I just started with Melavieology 31 and I'm super excited. This is a really great company, and their products are awesome. I'm doing a virtual drink tasting tomorrow night and I'd really like as many of you to come as possible. If I get enough people to come then I get to move to the next level. This is a really great opportunity for me, so I really hope you'll all come.

When I see a post like this, my first thought is that I really don't care how exciting the opportunity is for them. Then my second thought is that if they are being trained to make posts like

so that everyone benefits. More information at www.bni.com. I talk about them more in the next chapter.

⁸ I have nothing against networking marketing companies. Some of them make great products, and they can be a great opportunity for someone to dabble in sales. They also tend to be very egalitarian. If someone is willing to work hard enough and smart enough they can do very well for themselves.

that to build their business, the opportunity is very unlikely to do much for them because they are being trained very poorly.

This post is all about them and not about you. It mentions vaguely that the products are awesome but doesn't say how. Beyond that it just talks about their opportunity and their party and their goals. Anyone who does respond to this is doing it as a favor, not because they see value in it, and getting people to do you favors is no way to sell.

Favor sales are usually one-off sales. They are buying from you because they feel bad for you. On the other hand, if you can show someone value, then you have a customer for life.

As I said in that nifty footnote down there, I have nothing against network marketing companies per se. My friend Lori Lee Miller is an Isagenix affiliate, and she has a fantastic way of talking about the product. She never talks about her goals or what she is trying to do for herself. Instead, her focus is on the fact that she is trying to help people live longer, healthier lives. She talks about people's problems that she wants to solve. Even when she talks about the opportunity involved in selling Isagenix, it's always all about solving your problem.

That is the epitome of the WIIFM principle: focus on their problem and how you have a solution to their problem. If you are solving someone's problem, they will be more than happy to help you solve your problems in return.

In my own coaching business, I use and teach a system called Solution Oriented Marketing in which the conversation is entirely focused on the other person and their needs. We can get all the way to the third phone call before I ever even mention what I do or what I want. It works very well because people are eternally interested in their own needs and wants, and thus they will never tire of listening to their favorite radio station, WII-FM.

Chapter 4

Approaching Networking

Or Gaining from Giving

You know that guy at some parties who is clearly there with one thing in mind, and I don't mean eating hors d'oeuvres? He looks around the room for a lady who catches his eye like a hunter seeks prey. He swoops in and starts in with the lines, maybe some unwanted and unappreciated dance moves.

There is a parallel to this in the world of networking events: the desperate salesperson. This person is there to make a deal. They've got goods (or services) to move and they intend to move them there.

“Hey, baby, what are you paying for electricity with your current provider?”

Gentlemen, if you have never had the awkward and unpleasant experience of fending off an unwanted advance by an overly amorous suitor, you will at least be able to experience comparable awkwardness and claustrophobia when the desperate salesman (let's call him the Despero) tries to put the moves on you, except he doesn't want to put his hand on your thigh, he wants to put it on your wallet.

You do not want to be this person. Don't be this person. Please don't be this person. And if you must be this person, please don't tell anyone you read this book.

The term “Givers Gain” is one of the core principles of an organization called Business Network International or BNI⁹. BNI is one of the most successful referral based networking organizations in the world. It is so successful because the mindset that members are encouraged to have is to think first about what

⁹ You can find information on BNI and learn where and when your local chapters meet at www.bni.com. Visitors are always welcome. Just tell them I sent you.

they can do for their fellow members and secondarily about what is in it for them.

Each chapter is a group that meets weekly to learn about each other's businesses and to learn what each other member is looking for in terms of referrals. As the members travel through their days, they keep an eye out and an ear open for people who might need what their fellow group members have to offer.¹⁰

That lawyer I mentioned in the last chapter? Member of the Gold Star BNI chapter. A customer of mine needed a computer person to set things up for him, and I passed him on to a BNI contact.

To paraphrase President Kennedy: Ask not what your fellow BNI members can do for you, ask what you can do for your fellow BNI members!

What does this have to do with having the right attitude and not being the *Despero*? Well, these BNI folks are pretty smart, and BNI members even take the BNI mindset with them when they network at other events. They seek to engage in Giver Networking, that is going into every encounter asking "What can I do for you?" rather than "What can you do for me?"

One of the easiest ways to make sure that you are avoiding being the *Despero* is to never sell in a networking context.

But wait, you say, I'm going to this networking event to increase my sales. If I can't sell, then what's the point.

It's not that you can't sell to people that you meet in a networking setting, but you are not there to sell to them. You are there to develop a relationship, and your relationship will go nowhere if you are too focused on what you want from them to find anything that you can offer.

Jim O'Shea was a Director Consultant for our regional BNI, and he advises people to ask people they are meeting in a

¹⁰ BNI has been around for nearly forty years, and in that time some other organizations have also popped with variations on the model, including AmSpirit (www.amspirit.com), which follow the same basic concepts. This variety is wonderful for networkers, providing additional options that may work for you.

networking context, “Who is your ideal referral?” Many people will not have a ready answer, but it at least creates the tone in the conversation of “*what can I do for you?*” When you are open to doing good things for others, they become much more interested in doing good things for you.

Having this kind of attitude can also help you get what you want directly. A few weeks ago, I was calling on a local brewery. I had spoken to the marketing guy about some things that we might be able to produce for them, but when I returned, I was told that he was too busy to speak to me because they were very busy and were short staffed. If I were just thinking about what I wanted, I probably would have asked something lame like “When do you think things might settle down?” Instead, my mind went straight to solving their problem. “What kind of position are you hiring for?” I asked. Turns out they just needed unskilled help on an as-needed basis. I turned around and made a brief post on Facebook telling people about this job without mentioning the prospect’s name. Two days later, a friend of a friend of mine was working there full time.

The prospect is very appreciative as is the friend whose friend I found a job for. Will this turn directly into a sale for me? Who knows? But it took a matter of minutes, and these kinds of things always have a way of coming back around in the end.

As a business coach, I see every conversation as an opportunity to create benefit to people in my network and especially to my clients. People share their needs and concerns, giving me the opportunity to note problems which may have solutions in my network. They might even be problems I can solve through services I offer.

Every month, I am able to generate tens of thousands of dollars in business for people in my network by connecting problems to solutions.

It’s good business and good networking to do so, but it’s also just fun. Imagine talking to someone who tells you about a problem they’ve been grappling with for days or even weeks. Now

imagine what it would feel like to be able to offer a single introduction that can solve this problem for them just like that.

There's no feeling like it in the world.

I felt it was important to talk about a proper networking mindset before going on to techniques for two reasons. One is that I don't want people going out there using what I am teaching to just be more annoying Desperos. The other thing, which is far more relevant to your interests, is that the things you will learn in this book just won't work nearly as well if you are completely focused on yourself and not thinking about how to fulfill the needs of others.

Networking Into Sales

This is not to say that your networking activities cannot angle towards sales when the opportunity arises. Depending on your business, some people may express interest in buying from you when you tell them what you do. I sold printing for a local printing company, and it often happened that I would mention I worked for Minuteman Press, and they would express that they had been looking for someone to print this or that. Printing is one of those industries where it is easy to find a printer but it's not always easy to find a good one. They are relieved to have been able to make a connection that might solve a problem that they have.

What if the person you are networking with seems like they would be a good prospect for your product or service but they don't figuratively leap into your arms? Recalling that the networking event is not an appropriate place to give your sales presentation, you might do the following. First, gather information about their business. Ask many questions. Listen to the answers. No, really listen. Eventually, once you feel that they can benefit from what you do¹¹, gently suggest something like this: "You know,

¹¹ That they can *benefit* is really important. There must be something about your proposition that will make their life better for working with you. The benefit cannot simply be that *you* will gain a sale or a commission. It must be that *they* will be better for it. It's not about you. It's about them.

I've been listening to what you're saying, and you might be someone who could benefit from what we do. I don't want to take up too much of your time tonight, but could we schedule a time to meet up in the next week or so?" Then pull out your datebook and schedule a follow up. You've been talking for a bit and if you haven't been totally obnoxious, you have hopefully developed some rapport with the other person. There is a good chance that they will at least be willing to invest a little time to learn more about what you offer.

The expression "I don't want to take up too much of your time tonight" is important. An average networking event is 2 hours long. That's 120 minutes. But then there's usually about 10 minutes of announcements, and a lot of people leave 30 minutes early, and some people get there 15 minutes late. When all is said and done, you've got about 65 to make your connections. For you to monopolize their time so you can make your pitch is a bit selfish when you could just as easily meet them another time. Moreover, there is always a risk of being interrupted at an event and losing the opportunity.

Sometimes you can earn someone's business without ever actually asking for it. In my first visit to the Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce, I met a man who worked for a particular non profit. At the time, I was so new to selling printing, that I didn't even know enough about what our strengths were to try to push a sale, but, in the course of conversation, I mentioned a few of our particular capabilities.

It also turned out that he was a Rotarian¹² and they were organizing a renaissance themed gala. It was a fantastic idea except that they didn't know any renaissance themed performers. I, however, have been involved with renaissance faires for the better part of a decade and knew quite a few such performers. We ended up working together, and I introduced them to two performers who were perfect for the event.

A month or so later, this fellow gave me a call and asked if we did annual appeal letters. Many non-profits send out a fundraising letter around Thanksgiving when people are most inclined to give. The mailings tend to be somewhat complex and can be quite a headache for an organization to put together themselves, and Minuteman has been doing them for all kinds of non-profits for over 20 years in a way that takes much of the stress out of the process. My boss and I went out to his office for a relatively brief meeting, and they hired us to do the job. We made a sale, they outsourced a stressful project. Everyone was happy.

The important thing about this story is that I never solicited business from this particular customer. I helped him in ways that I could and I made sure he knew what I had to offer, but I left it to him to express interest. There was never any kind of sales pressure.

Now that I am running my own business, I almost never “pitch.” I simply engage people in conversations about their needs and how I might be able to help. If I think they have a problem to which I might be able to offer a solution, I simply ask, “Would you like some help with that?” People rarely say no to that question. Who doesn't want help with their problem?

¹² I am also a Rotarian, and, as I update this edition, I am the President of the Groton Rotary Club (grotonrotary.org). Rotary has 1.2 million members worldwide, participating in projects large and small. Chances are there's a playground or other resource in your town that Rotary built. Rotary is also probably supporting other great causes you care about. Most impressively, Rotary was the leading force in the near eradication of Polio, making it only the second disease in human history to be eradicated completely. To learn more about Rotary, I encourage you to visit www.rotary.org

It is very difficult to get to the level of networking that people are just coming to you, but when you remember that people can approach you without you needing to solicit them, it gives you a certain level of calm which makes it easier to allow such relationships to develop naturally.

Always Only Sometimes Be Closing

I'm sure you've heard "Always Be Closing"¹³, and somehow it sunk into your psyche as great advice, probably because of Alec Baldwin's powerful performance.¹⁴ Because of that, the above advice might sound strange. Here's the thing about Baldwin's speech: It is terrible advice. Absolutely awful. ABC means that you should think of your prospects as a lion thinks of a wounded gazelle. It is predatory. It was mediocre advice in 1992 when the film came out, and it is downright self destructive today.

Sure, you can use ABC to pressure some poor saps into making a purchase, but that will not build a business. It will merely earn you a reputation as a high pressure, aggressive salesperson.

The best salespeople are always on, but not always closing. They are always on the lookout for people who need what they can offer. They are always looking for people that they can help, whether it's with a sale or an introduction. If an opportunity for a sale presents itself, they will take it, but they are certainly not always closing.

Car sales is the kind of business where a lot of salespeople fall for the ABC trap. They think that once they have their hands on a customer, they must grip them tightly and squeeze until the commitment comes out. If you've ever bought a car, you've probably experienced high pressure sales techniques.

¹³ The phrase "Always Be Closing" is most commonly associated with Alec Baldwin's monolog in *Glengarry Glen Ross*. It is the story of a group of the biggest losers ever to try sales and you should learn absolutely nothing from it except for how *not* to operate in the world of sales.

¹⁴ *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Directed by James Foley, performances by Alec Baldwin, Al Pacino, and Jack Lemmon, New Line Cinema, 1992.

I sold cars for a number of years, and I was able to sell a great number of cars by doing exactly the opposite. Knowing that many of my customers were traumatized by previous sales experiences, I exerted as little pressure as possible. I made the process comfortable, natural, and organic. I maintained control, but not overtly. Then I had my sales secret: if the customer wanted to leave, I let them.

So often, the customer just wants to test if they are able to leave, and once they prove that the power is theirs, they are comfortable completing the transaction.

I was also completely comfortable in letting them visit another dealership. Why? Because I was confident that it was likely they'd run into a high pressure, aggressive salesperson. Most of the time, my customer would escape from the clutches of the hard driving salesperson and rush back to me so they could conclude the deal and not have to subject themselves to any more unpleasant sales pressure.

Next time someone tells you to Always Be Closing, remind them that no one actually successfully completes a sale in that entire awful movie, and one of them ends up in jail.

Chapter 5

Networker Attitude

Or You Can Do It Because You Think You Can Do It

2014 was not my first foray into networking. When I lived in Western Massachusetts, I consciously made an effort to develop a personal network. I was inspired by a book I read called Never Eat Alone by Keith Ferrazzi. It is a great book about developing a network, and I decided that I wanted to be able to be a resource to people. I wanted them to be able to ask me for any connection they might need and I would either have someone to refer them to or be able to find someone.

When I came to the Shoreline of Connecticut, I wanted to be able to do that here. When did I start telling people that they should use me as a resource and ask me for any connections that they might need? I don't think it was at that first BAH, but it was certainly soon after.

Why would I tell people to use me as a resource to get introductions to people they wanted to meet when I barely knew anyone myself? Two simple reasons: first, people like to know people who are a resource, meaning that saying it expanded my network. Second, a personal network is like a muscle. The more you use it, the stronger it gets.

Let's say you call me up and say that you are looking to buy a brand new Hyundai. It so happens that I know someone who sells Hondas, I have a customer who sells Fords and Mazdas, I have former coworkers selling Kias and Volkswagens, and a contact who sells Chrysler. However, I don't have a connection that sells Hyundai.

But think about this: let's say I find a good, well recommended Hyundai salesman that I want to develop a networking relationship with. What do you think is more likely to open the door for me? "I'd like to meet up with you so we could

develop a relationship which *may* lead to my sending you business” OR “I have a friend looking for a referral to a Hyundai salesman, so let’s meet up so I can learn a bit about you and see if you would be a good match for my friend.” I think that the latter is much more likely to result in a meeting and an ongoing networking relationship.

I’m sure you’ve heard the saying “fake it ‘til you make it.” There is another similar saying: “Act as if.”

Act as if you’ve already made it.

Act as if you already have a vast network.

Act as if you are a good and important person to know.

Acting that way allows you to make more connections, and every connection makes it more true.

In 2010, I made an ill-fated foray into the world of insurance sales and financial advising. I took a job with New York Life. When I say “job”, I mean that it took up the time that I would normally spend working, but I do not mean that they actually paid me for it. It was straight commision, so I had to make something happen and fast.

A friend of mine had invited me to visit his BNI group, which was a wonderful experience and my first exposure to BNI. Unfortunately for me at the time, one of the things that makes BNI unique is that each seat is exclusive. There is only one printer, only one plumber, and only one financial advisor or insurance salesman, and since those jobs are so dependent on finding leads, the financial advisor and insurance seats fill up real quick in every BNI chapter.

So there I was without a seat to sit in, but I needed to make connections. So I acted as if I had a network. I acted as if I was already part of something. I created the Stone Soup Networking Group. I started talking up this networking group which would be the core of a referral list I would develop to send people to as I discovered their needs, and people joined it. We had about 30 members after a few months.

For those not familiar, this is the Stone Soup story, courtesy of Wikipedia¹⁵:

Some travelers come to a village, carrying nothing more than an empty cooking pot. Upon their arrival, the villagers are unwilling to share any of their food stores with the hungry travelers.

Then the travelers go to a stream and fill the pot with water, drop a large stone in it, and place it over a fire. One of the villagers becomes curious and asks what they are doing. The travelers answer that they are making "stone soup", which tastes wonderful, although it still needs a little bit of garnish to improve the flavor, which they are missing.

The villager does not mind parting with a few carrots to help them out, so that gets added to the soup. Another villager walks by, inquiring about the pot, and the travelers again mention their stone soup which has not reached its full potential yet.

The villager hands them a little bit of seasoning to help them out. More and more villagers walk by, each adding another ingredient. Finally, the stone (being inedible) is removed from the pot, and a delicious and nourishing pot of soup is enjoyed by all.

Although the travelers have thus tricked the villagers into sharing their food with them, they have successfully transformed it into a tasty and nutritious meal which they share with the donors.

Ultimately, the New York Life position was doomed because I was not able to monetize the networking I was doing, as I will discuss in a later chapter, but the experience gave me a deep understanding of what it was to develop a personal network and the tremendous power of approaching the networking process

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stone_Soup

from the standpoint of developing a network to refer *to* rather than one to get referrals *from*.

This is developing what I call your Personal Referral Network (PRN). A PRN is where your value to and from your network comes from. Whether you are a CEO, a stay at home mom, or a penniless sitar player, you can add value to a relationship by having a mental (or physical) Rolodex¹⁶ of people who have something to offer those who need their services or products or knowledge or support.

In my coaching work, one of the pieces of value I am able to provide is my ability to connect my clients to other clients. Since I am working closely with them to grow their business, I am intimately familiar with their needs and capabilities. This allows me to make great introductions among them which have created some powerful and lucrative relationships.

The best thing is that the PRN is a value to you. It is a value to those you meet whom you can refer. It is a value to those who are in it, having business referred to them. At no point in the process is anyone made poorer for the interaction, and generally everyone is at least a little better off. This is why you will find that many people are quite happy to do a one-to-one meeting with you if the purpose of the meeting is networking.

When I found myself in an entirely new town, I was able to put this information to work to rapidly develop a new network.

Networking From the Word Go

The exciting thing about this is that you can start right away. It is amazing how, even in a small group of people, there are numerous valuable connections that can be made.

As I write this, I have eight coaching clients. Six of them are doing business with one another. In a group of eight people in different fields of business, there are three connections to be made, and probably more as they get to know each other.

¹⁶ For younger readers not familiar with a Rolodex, think of an address book. It's worth Googling if you've never seen one.

As I launch my group programs in 2021 and increase the number of people involved, the connections will increase exponentially.

When I first started attending networking events on the Connecticut Shoreline, I had an experience much like this.

The first person I met was a Realtor. We chatted a bit. We had a good conversation, and I went on to the next person.

The next person I encountered was a nice guy, who had an interesting story.

The third person, I soon found out, was looking to meet Realtors. “Realtors, you say? Do you know that Realtor over there?” He did not, so I introduced them.

I knew three people in the room, and the third one was looking for the first one but didn’t know it until I introduced them.

I do this when I give talks on networking. I’ll get a volunteer from the audience, and I’ll ask them to share who they are looking for. Four out of five times, someone in the audience is either the person they are looking for or knows that person, even if the audience is only a dozen people.

The only thing you need to get started is the belief that you can connect people, and the desire to do so.

Does Anyone Need an Introduction?

I was having a bad day. Yes, even I have bad days! Some things had happened at work that really put me in a bad head space: very down on myself, lacking confidence, and feeling all around low. That afternoon, two different people contacted me asking for connections. Helping people always improves my mood. It makes me feel valuable. After all, if I can introduce you to someone whom it will benefit you to know, then I was helpful.

After these two connections, I figured I might as well keep the ball rolling. I made a post to Facebook saying that I just made two good introductions and that I enjoy networking because it gives me the opportunity to connect people with people who will do them some good. I then asked “What are *you* looking for?”

About seven people answered with various needs. I was able to make recommendations for five of them. One I did not have a suggestion for, and one of them was looking to fill a job that they actually believed I might be a good candidate for.

This is a very good exercise for a number of reasons.

First, it can really help some people.

Second, it is a good way to gauge how comprehensive your network is, how effective your PRN is. This is a real world test of what variety of problems you can solve with your network.

Finally, you can use this as a tool to expand your network. If someone asks you for a connection that you do not have, you can use that request as a reason to build your network. For example, one of the people who contacted me said he was looking for a new job in another state in an industry that I have limited connections in.

I then made another post asking for anyone who had connections in that industry in that state. Three people answered that they had such connections, and I put him in touch with all three of them. I now know a bit more about the resources that those connections have when someone else might have a need. Furthermore, one of them introduced me to someone else who might be helpful. This is an entirely new contact that I was able to connect with because I was looking to solve this one friend's problem.

What does a PRN look like once you have a good set of connections? It looks like this conversation I had at a Business After Hours when I was editing the first edition of this book. I was speaking with someone for the first time, but she had been in BNI a number of years earlier.

"OK, I'll do the BNI thing. I am looking for someone who can run a team building workshop for my office. Do you know anyone?" she asked.

"Vanessa Reed," I replied. "Hold on a moment while I send a joint email introducing you to each other."

It's that easy, once you've put the work in.

Your Value Proposition

There is something about you that makes you uniquely awesome. I have quite a knowledge of sales and networking. I know how to write and speak in a way that can transmit it to others. I also have a knack for finding the best in people and bringing it out. This gives me a unique value, and a reason why people might find me good to know. I am also quite adept at connecting people to other people that they would like to meet. Connecting those with problems to those with solutions.

What is your unique value proposition? What are you better than most people at? What is it about you that makes people richer for having met you? Hopefully, you know what it is. It could be that you, or your company, is really exceptionally good at solving a certain problem. It could be that you are really funny and enjoyable to be around. If you are at a total loss, keep in mind that you have read this book and know a lot of excellent networking tips that you can share, and you know the author¹⁷.

Whatever it is that makes you worth meeting, you must discover what it is. You must internalize it. Going into every encounter, it should pass through your mind. “I am awesome and this person is fortunate to meet me because _____. ” It should also not pass your lips. Don’t tell people how awesome you are, allow them to discover it for themselves. Spoiler alerts and all. Just keep it in your mind so that you remember it and call upon it in those moments when you need that little extra burst of confidence to introduce yourself.

This can be especially valuable when you are meeting someone of great renown. We’ll talk in a later chapter about networking with big important people, but knowing your unique value proposition allows you to hold the thought in your mind of “This person may be a millionaire, and that’s impressive and all, but I am _____.”

¹⁷ If you don’t know the author yet, why not email him at michael@guywhoknowsaguy.com? Then you’ll get to drop his name at parties and sound like a big deal.

Everyone Falls Down. The Important Thing is Getting Up.

This book spent quite a few months being mostly finished. Partly because I was too busy. Partly because one of my motivations in writing it was to demonstrate that I was more than just a common salesman, then I became a Marketing Manager before I finished the book. Over time, I also forgot about the book because I had lost my confidence. I had forgotten my own unique value proposition. I had allowed the external to reform the internal. It happens.

Then, I had two experiences that snapped me out of it and got me back into the book. The first was that I worked at the Steampunk Worlds Fair. Among my many projects was a project called ConCardia¹⁸, a collectible card game/scavenger hunt/marketing tool. It started at fandom conventions and has expanded and improved.

I created ConCardia because I was asked to create an augmented reality game to improve attendee experience at a particular fandom event company. The first version of the game was inexpensive and simple. It was printed black and white on my home laser printer. The toner rubbed off on your fingers. In spite of this, people still found it fun to roam the convention looking for cards, and I knew I was onto something. In time, the cards were professionally printed, and eventually they became real, full color, playing cards. The rules were refined and the game became more playable.

Over time, ConCardia grew and grew in popularity. In the beginning, I needed to seek people out and push them to have cards to give out in the scavenger hunt and beg them to let me run it at their conventions. Five years later, people would call me out of the blue to ask how ConCardia can be part of their convention.

¹⁸ ConCardia is no longer an active project, but the web site is still up at www.concardia.info and conceivably it could be resurrected if an event were interested in having it as part of their experience.

It was a good reminder of what I was capable of.

The other event that gave me a jolt was a bit more unexpected. I was taking the 5 train downtown in New York City, and I'll let this excerpt from my blog tell the story:

This morning, I got onto the 5 train to go Downtown, and this guy gets on the train and starts speaking like he's at a podium. My first thought was that he was selling Jesus, but he wasn't. He was selling a book he had written.

His name was Randy Kearse. He had gone to prison for 15 years when he was younger, and he spent the time locked up preparing for when he would get out and change his life. He told us that he had his own publishing company and very eloquently invited us to look at his book.

Of course, no one looked up except me, but I bought a copy of his book. I wanted to read the story of a guy who was gutsy enough to walk onto a crowded train and just open up a sales pitch.

It got me thinking. This guy was in prison for 15 years, and now he's a writer who has apparently sold 75,000 copies of his books doing exactly what I saw this morning. I've never been to prison. I've got a college degree. I'm a little short on excuses today.

These two events conspired to give me the kick in the pants I needed to get back up, brush myself off, and realize that it was time to finish the book.

Maybe you are fully aware of the value you have to offer, or maybe you have forgotten. If you have forgotten, maybe my story or perhaps Randy's can be the reminder you need to rediscover what you have to offer.

Chapter 6

Navigating the Networking Event

Or No, They Don't All Know Each Other

But They All Know Each Other Already!

You finally make it out to a networking event. Maybe a Business After Hours. Maybe some other kind of mixer. You come in, you pay your admission, you put your business card in the raffle basket. Now what?

You look around the room and it's full of people talking to each other. Everyone is engrossed in conversation. They all already know each other, and you're the newbie trying to find your way in. It's a high school dance all over again.

Or is it?

What would be the point of a networking event where everyone all knew each other? There have been some such events, and they tend to dwindle down and eventually fail entirely. Why? Because the entire purpose of a networking event is to meet people and make connections.

What about those knots of people having long, engrossed conversations. There are two such groups you will likely find at a networking event.

The first group is people from the same company who are there because the company pays for it and it's a great place to catch up, have some wine from the open bar and have a nice after work experience. Often, these are not necessarily people who really need to network, but the company sends them out because even at the absolute minimum level of networking effort an opportunity might stumble upon you. You can usually tell these groups because everyone's name tag has the same company on it.

These are decent groups to approach because they are in a very comfortable, social mood, and, deep down, they know that their job here is to meet new people who might be of benefit for

their company, and you approaching them gives them the opportunity to do so without leaving their comfort zone.

The other sort who will be having long engrossing conversations are people who just met each other. Think about it. If you see someone you know at an event, you might chat a little. *How's the wife? How's the dog? How about that local sports team?* Then, unless you have some actual business to talk about, chances are that you'll move on. However, if you meet someone new, you don't know anything about them. Even the most mundane questions are interesting. "Where do you work?" "What does your company do?" "Are you new to the area?" "Who's your ideal referral?" It's all new ground, and you're all there to meet new people, so the delving may be deep.

These people are also great to approach. You are walking up to two or more people who are just feeling each other out. Even if you just join the conversation without saying much, you can still listen in and overhear their quick biographies.

So, those groups that all look like they know each other? Either they do know each other and are looking to meet new people but are too shy to go out and meet them, or they don't actually know each other and just met.

Why Are You Here?

There is someone you are trying to meet. There is someone that, if you were to get to know them, could change your life and do great things for your business. Do you know who that person is?

I bet you thought I was about to tell you. How should I know? I don't even know who you are, let alone whom you most need to meet!

In BNI, every week they tell the group who they would most like to be referred to or have referred to them. The more specific one is, the more effective it is. This is a surprisingly difficult thing to do. However, it is incredibly valuable. Why? Because once you know who you are trying to get an introduction

to, all that remains is to get the introduction, which is relatively easy.

Here's an exercise you might find valuable. Take a piece of paper and write down 5 categories of people whom it would be good for you to make connections with. Perhaps they are potential clients. Perhaps they are people who could give you advice or access to resources. Maybe they are even people you could refer others to, people who could be of service to your clients and friends.

This is your wish list. Imagine you rubbed a magic lamp and a networking genie came out. He'd grant your wishes, but those wishes could only come in the form of introductions. Who would you wish for the genie to introduce you to?

Hold onto this list because we'll do more with it later. In the meantime, let's get back to the networking event. Now you have 5 categories of people you are looking to make contact with. Keep an eye out for them as you roam the event. If you see someone who might be in such a category, try to engage them in conversation.

Jumping In

How do you jump into a conversation? This is an important skill because most people are already into a conversation. It's not like a dance where the unattached partners are sitting along the wall waiting for someone to invite them in.

The simplest way to ease into a conversation in which you don't know anyone is to simply approach the conversation, enter the circle and start actively listening as they speak. If they are conversant networkers, they will notice you there, introduce themselves, and bring you into the conversation, possibly asking you questions about yourself.

If they do not, just nod along appreciatively and listen to what they are saying. It is quite possible that at some point an opening will arrive in which you have something valuable to contribute. Of course, the more networking you have been doing

and the larger a Personal Referral Network you have, the more likely you will have something valuable to offer.

Don't force it. You don't win any points for trying to shoehorn yourself into the conversation. Just wait for a natural moment to contribute.

Ambassadors

Many Chambers of Commerce and other networking organizations have people who are called "ambassadors". They are people who are very comfortable with networking whose job is to help people who might be new to the process or just new to the organization's events to get around and meet some people.

Here's the thing to remember about a Chamber of Commerce, it is a private organization. While it is non-profit, it still survives on memberships, and it gets memberships by providing value to those members. If it does not provide value, then it will not continue to have members. No members: no Chamber. Thus, they want those members to be happy and feel that their membership dues are well spent.

When it comes to networking events like Business After Hours events, the best way to make people feel that they have found value is to facilitate good connections. That is the job of the ambassador.

A good ambassador will try to find out what kind of connections you are trying to make. Remember that list of categories you are looking for? If they know that, they will often know half a dozen people to introduce you to, any one of which would make it well worth your while to attend the event.

In some organizations, the ambassadors are easy to find because they have badges and ribbons and such. Some events don't have official ambassadors, but that doesn't mean you are on your own. There are always de facto ambassadors. Chamber staff are often a good bet. Most chambers have people whose job it is to recruit members and keep them recruited. They often know many of the members and are highly motivated to make sure you have a productive event. Let them know what kind of people you are

looking to meet, and there is a good chance that they will be able to introduce you.

There are also many networkers who would be quite happy to serve as your ambassador. I know this because I am one of them, and I love making connections for people. There is nothing I enjoy more at a networking event than being able to introduce two people who are better off for the introduction. So, should you be fortunate enough to be at a networking event with me, feel free to tell me who you are trying to meet, and I'll help you make some good connections.

The Power of an Introduction

Let's imagine you and I are at a networking event. You happen to mention that you notice the CEO of XYZCo is at the event. You have been trying to make a connection at XYZCo because you believe that your company could do some good for them or perhaps because you believe that you have skills that could serve them well. Maybe XYZCo is a larger company and you feel that the CEO is too high up for you to talk to. You really just want to talk to the purchasing guy or the HR guy or the marketing guy.

I will tell you two things. First, I will tell you that there is no such thing as approaching too high in the power structure. At worst, he will refer down to the right person, which tends to have some weight, him being the CEO and all. Second, I will tell you to wait right here because I'll introduce you.

"Do you know him?" you might ask.

"Nope. Never met him," I'll reply. "Wait here."

I will then walk over to Mr. CEO. "Mr. CEO," I'll say¹⁹. "Do you know Shelly²⁰? She's over there, and I really think you should meet her. She was telling me about some ideas that I think you might find interesting."

¹⁹ With a name like Mr. CEO, it's no wonder he rose to that position.

²⁰ Your name is Shelly for the purpose of this illustration.

Since I did this at an opportune time when he was not terribly busy or engaged, he'll acquiesce and come with me to meet you.

You are hopefully ready to tell Mr. CEO about your very interesting ideas.

What happened here? I just introduced you, whom I do not know terribly well, to someone else, whom I do not know at all. How is that possible?

There are two things at play. The first is that a third party brings credibility. The fact that I am saying that you have something interesting to say is more credible than if you say it about yourself. The second is heuristics. What is a heuristic? It's a mental shortcut. The world is really complicated, and our simple human brains are not up to the task of working through it all, so we use shortcuts. If someone is introducing you to someone else, you usually know the person making the introduction, so the connection to the third party makes the introduction credible. But this works in reverse. The fact that a recommendation is being made implies that the introducer is known, lending similar credibility.

Most importantly, you can do exactly what I did in this story. If you have a friend or associate who would benefit from an introduction to someone at an event you are at, there is no reason why you cannot walk over and make the connection for them.

What's It All For?

The purpose of a networking event is to make new connections and renew old connections. It is not to make sales. It is not to have long, in depth conversations. It is not to make sales. It is not to create deep connections. For heaven's sake, *it is not to make sales!*

Did I mention that you shouldn't try to make sales at a networking event?²¹

²¹ In case it's unclear, don't go to a networking event looking to make sales.

So one measure of success for your attendance at a networking event is how many *good* connections you made. That word “good” is important there. Just getting someone’s business card is not a good connection. Just giving someone your card is not a connection at all.

A good connection is a contact in which enough interest has been sparked that both parties find value in a follow up contact, whether it’s a meeting, phone call, or whatever newfangled social media²² platform is popular by the time you read this.

Ideally, you’ll want to spend no more than 5 minutes or so with any particular person. That’s the part I’m not very good at. It’s not really a problem to spend too long with one person, except that there are only about 65 productive minutes in an average networking mixer, which means if you spend 20 minutes with one person, then you can only reasonably expect to make 2-3 contacts rather than 5-10.

Why so short? Surely you can’t make any kind of meaningful connection in five minutes? Indeed you cannot, nor can you make a meaningful connection in 30 minutes at an event. Taking this networking contact to the next level is something that will best occur at a follow up meeting. Coffee, breakfast, a tour of your factory, or chat on Zoom. The context doesn’t matter, the meeting is what’s important.

Each person you meet at an event, the goal is to determine if it is someone that you’d like to develop a better connection with, and, if so, to arrange a follow up meeting. Don’t be afraid to ask for that follow up meeting right then and there. This could take the form of asking for their card and asking for permission to call later

²² When I wrote the first edition in 2017, Facebook was the big thing, and LinkedIn was pretty good. As I work on the second edition in 2020, there’s a global pandemic, so Zoom is all the rage. Google Meet is making a pretty good play for the market. And TikTok is definitely something, but I’m not sure even the people who run it know what. By the time you read this, half of them might be broken up or shut down or replaced by whatever will come next. Don’t get attached to platforms.

to set up a follow up meeting, or it could even be pulling out your datebook (or smartphone with Google Calendar) and setting a date and time right then and there.

Don't Be That Guy

There are a few different people you do not want to be at a networking event: The Card Collector, The Social Climber, The Presenter, and The Wino.

The Card Collector is someone who thinks that his or her success at a networking event is related to how many business cards they can collect, and how many of their cards they can press into other people's hands. They think that networking is some kind of professional version of Pokemon, and they're determined to "catch 'em all." They will jump from conversation to conversation, snatching cards and pushing cards on others. No one really knows what that person does or why they have their card, but they sure got that card.

The Social Climber is always looking for a better conversation than the one he or she is in. When you talk to this person, you can tell you only have half of their attention because the other half, as well as both of their eyes, are constantly looking for a better conversation than the one they are in. They are looking for a better prospect, a better contact, or a better connection than you.

The Presenter has something to say, and if you are not careful, you will spend much of the event listening to it. Some are there to sell you whatever it is they are selling, whether you have any interest or not. Others have something else entirely to present. This person is not interested in what you do or what you are looking for, unless that information ties into what they are presenting to you.

The Wino knows that networking events have open bars and takes full advantage of this fact. If you want to do business with this person, make sure to do it in the first 25 minutes of the event. After that it is too late. There is nothing wrong with having a drink or two at an event, but limit yourself to one per hour. I don't

care how good you think your tolerance is, one per hour is the limit. There are places to show off your drinking prowess. A networking event is not that place.

On Business Cards

You should have a business card. That sounds like a pretty obvious statement for most people.

Every once in a while, I'll ask someone for their card and they will get this big grin as if they have figured out the secret before everyone else. "I don't have one," they'll proudly proclaim.

They will then inform me that they, unlike the other neanderthals in the room, do not carry business cards because they are living in the 21st century, and *they* have some amazing technological solution. They will then tell me to scan their QR code, text a code to a number, or InstaLinkedTweetTokBook them.

So technological! So advanced! So eco friendly! So unlikely for me to remember to follow up.

Here's the problem with any digital solution I've ever seen. There's no way for them to remain front and center. If I put you in my address book, which I may or may not feel the desire to take the time to do on the spot, after 3 days, it no longer appears at the top as a new entry. It is now in a group of 5,000 contacts.

If it is a link or a website or bookmark, it is, once again, lost in the infinite clutter of my device.

On the other hand, that little piece of stiff paper with your contact information on it goes into my pocket. When I return to my desk, I will put all those little cards in a pile and, when I have a moment, I will go through them and follow up with each as appropriate.

Since your little piece of paper is not in my stack, it is unlikely I'll remember to follow up unless you made such a smashing and unforgettable impression on me that I made a special note to contact you.

I wrote a book on networking, I speak in public professionally, I help people exponentially improve their business, and I tend to make people laugh. I'm pretty memorable. I still

carry a little piece of cardstock with my contact information on it so you can follow up with me because I don't think I'm memorable enough to make you remember to look up whatever digital trace I give you.

You're not too cool or too technologically hip to have a business card. Business cards serve a very specific purpose, and I don't see that changing any time soon.

If you're going to network, get business cards. Not doing so doesn't make you seem cool. It just makes you forgettable.

This is not to say that digital business cards aren't a great resource, but for in person connection your best strategy is to put the link to your digital card on your physical card achieving the best of both worlds.

Questions for reflection

- What are some organizations that host networking events in your area?
- Who might be resources to make introductions and connections for you at events?
- What are some examples of The Card Collector, The Social Climber, The Presenter, and The Wino that you have encountered at events?
- What did you not like about how they conducted themselves?
- How can you use what you learned in this chapter at your next event?

Chapter 7

Small Talk is Big

We've all met that person who thinks they are too good for small talk. Small talk is a waste of time, they say. Let's just get down to business. Who's got time to talk about the weather, the kids, the town meeting?

I have met mayors, senators, representatives, CEOs, CFOs, and other people of stature. These are very busy people, and you know what these people start the conversations with? Small talk. They ask about family, work, and the community. Why do they do this? Because small talk is where you get brief insight into where someone is coming from. Even 2-4 minutes of casual conversation gives you an idea of the first few things that are on their mind.

Are they having a good day today or has it been a rough one so far? Is business good or bad? What fires this person up *besides* making a buck?

Wouldn't it be awesome to know the answers to these questions before you try to advance the conversation? In fact, in the networking context, it might be quite effective to fill 5 minutes with small talk, give a small teaser of what you can offer, ideally tying back to something that the other person mentioned earlier, and then schedule another time to meet and speak longer.

Theodore Roosevelt once said, "no one cares what you know until they know you care." If you just launch right into your business and the serious matters of the day, especially in a networking or social context, people are likely to tune you right out.

The other big reason that small talk is valuable is that you might discover an unexpected need that you can help with. Maybe their child is having trouble in school and you know a great tutor to refer. Maybe their spouse lost their job and you know of a good opening for them. Most people care more about the welfare of

their family than they care for themselves. If you can help their child or close family member with a problem they are facing (which is one of the great things that a strong Personal Referral Network can do for you), then you have not just created a business connection, you have likely earned a friend and ally.

Small talk is a fine art, and I have met some people who are absolutely fantastic at it. There are many fine resources on the topic, and if you are not comfortable with small talk, I highly encourage you to study and practice.

When You Can Get Down to Business

There are times where it is appropriate to get down to business, especially in an actual sales meeting. In [The Secrets of Great Rainmakers](#) by Jeffrey J. Fox, he suggests that filler conversation and artificial rapport building is not effective. He advises not to try to force casual conversation by looking around the office to find topics of conversation. Instead, he advises that the opening question should simply confirm the time available. For example, “We are scheduled to meet for half an hour. Is that still good for you?” This is very important because it establishes how much time you have. You don’t want to discover after 10 minutes of rapport building that the prospect only had 10 minutes to spend with you.

He suggests that small talk might be more appropriate after the serious work of the meeting has gone by. This may seem counter intuitive. After all, the purpose of rapport is to make the prospect more willing to open up. However, consider that the prospect knows the presentation and close is coming, so there is a bit of tension hanging over the conversation. After the presentation and close, however, whether or not the prospect made a purchase, their guard is down. The tension is dissipated. It’s all out on the table. At that point a little chatting might do you well.

As you pack up and prepare to leave, start chatting. Offhand comments about their needs or conversation about items around the room. Anything to get words flowing is good. Now that

the tension is dissipated, you never know if the prospect might be willing to open up and reveal something that they did not mention before. It's entirely possible that the need you came in to address was not a strong need, but that there is another need that you discover in that post-close chit chat.

I have made more than one sale after the prospect has said no and I packed up my things. Don't be afraid to ease back into a sales conversation as the conversation reveals a need.

Questions for reflection

- What are some questions you might use to start casual conversation?
- When is small talk effective and appropriate? When is it not?
- What are the benefits of small talk in a networking setting?

Chapter 8

They're Just People

In my younger years, I was quite prone to being star struck. People of all kinds of roles would impress me with the glory of their awesomeness. Authors, business owners, convention chairs, and anyone else who made things happen impressed me to the point that I was too intimidated to talk to them. Of course, as I got older, I got to work with these people side by side and realized that they are just people who have lofty positions. They are not gods walking among us.

In addition to teaching workshops on sales and networking, I sometimes teach workshops on meeting people in a romantic context, which is, in many ways, simply a subset of sales and networking. I sometimes tell the story of when I was a younger and more single man. I met a striking woman who I immediately relegated to the status of “out of my league.” I’m sure you’ve heard the term, as though there were somehow classifications of datability, like wrestlers have weight classes.

As we got to know each other, and eventually dated, I discovered something amazing. Apparently no one had told her what league she was in... or no one told me what league I was in. Or, more realistically, there are no leagues. People are just people, and our anxiety is great at telling us that other people are better than us. So much better that we couldn’t possibly be worth their time²³.

In the world of business, people have a little easier time knowing what “league” they are in. They have titles, paychecks, and other signs of status that indicate where they might expect to find themselves on the pecking order.

²³ If anyone is out of my league, it’s my wife Amy who is an amazing mother, and a fantastic wife who takes care of me even when I try to tell her she should take care of herself.

However, one does not get to higher titles, larger paychecks, and all the other good things by thinking themselves better than other people. Doing so tends to close doors and restrict opportunities, and perhaps that person that you thought you were too good to talk to had no problem having a nice chat with your competitor.

When I worked for Minuteman Press, the title on my business card was “Sales and Marketing Strategist.” I did not work in management. I did not hold exalted titles. I did, however, count among my circle of connections people with titles like “executive director”, “marketing director”, quite a few “general managers”, a couple of “mayors”, a few “presidents²⁴”, a couple “representatives”, numerous “owners”, quite a few “authors”, and even one “Chief Awesomeness Officer.”

What I have learned meeting all of these fantastic people is that they are just that: people. They have problems like the rest of us: bad backs, trouble keeping weight off, social anxiety, and more.

People are people, and people have problems. People who have problems are looking for solutions to those problems, and if you have solutions, these people want to meet you. Remember that unique value proposition from a couple chapters back?

“Oh, you’re a CEO. That’s nice. I’m the winner of the Goldenvale kingdom wide sword fighting championship three years running.” I’ll remind you again that this is to build your own confidence, not something to announce. For all you know, this particular CEO is uncultured and thus unimpressed by such things. Or worse, perhaps she was sword champion for four years at some point in the past and now you’re being challenged to a duel by the CEO, and that just gets awkward.

If you are looking to speak to this person of exalted title, it is likely because you believe that you have something to offer them, and if you have something to offer them, presumably it

²⁴ This is a place where capitalization is really important. The President of the United States is capitalized. The president of the Chamber of Commerce is not. The President of the United States is not in my circle of connections...yet.

would be to their benefit. Everyone wants to learn about something that might benefit them.

What if you don't have anything to offer? What if you are really a lowly individual, just rolled off the turnip truck, and you are hoping that you might be able to benefit from their greatness? In a way, that is something of value in and of itself.

Remember, people are people, and people like to feel useful. Even if this person employs hundreds of people or is worth millions of dollars, it is entirely possible that they would appreciate the opportunity to help you.

I have held a variety of positions in a variety of science fiction conventions and other geeky events, including chairman of about half a dozen conventions. We often get fairly accomplished scientists to speak at our volunteer run conventions for no fee. Why would a highly successful scientist want to come and speak to a bunch of geeks for free? Well, consider this interaction that might occur at a gathering of scientists:

First scientist: "I'm Dr. Smith, and I have a PhD."

Second scientist: "That's nice, I also have a PhD."

Lot's of scientists: "Us too."

One guy in the back: "I have two PhDs and a bunch of patents."

Not such a big deal that Dr. Smith is a scientist. Sure, other scientists may be interested to meet him because he does interesting work or has made notable achievements, but they all have some kind of interesting work and have made notable achievements.

Now consider how that might go at a sci-fi convention.

Scientist: "I'm Dr. Smith, and I have a PhD."

Geek: "Oh, my God, really! That's awesome."

Another Geek: "Seriously! That's so cool. What do you research? It's so cool to meet you!"

A scientist at a convention often has a similar experience to a rock star at a party, and for the same reason: because they have an exalted position and are the kind of person that most people don't usually get to meet face to face. However, looking from the scientist's perspective, they are often very surprised by the attention. They just think that they do a job. In their day to day life, no one is there telling them how amazing they are, and they probably feel that they are adequate to their role.

Randall Munroe is the author of *XKCD*, one of the most popular webcomics ever on the Internet. He was a guest at 3Pi-Con, which I was involved in running. Randall does not attend many conventions, but when he does he is always quite amazed at the reaction that he gets from people who meet him. While he knows from his analytics that millions of people have read his work, it is a very different thing to see the numbers on the screen as to have people get tongue tied and star struck when they meet him.

It is the same way for the VIP that you might like to meet and maybe get some advice or other help from. He is in a position of power, but most of the people he interacts with are probably of comparable power. That is not to say that he doesn't get approached by people all the time because of his power, but those are probably people who have nothing to offer him. They are people who want to take.

What do you have to offer? Appreciation. Something that too many people discredit and thus don't think to provide. You might say something like this.

"Mr. CEO, I've been really impressed with what you have done for XYZCo. I'm getting started in my career, and I was wondering if I might be able to ask you a couple of questions? Get the benefit of your experience?"

Who can say no to that kind of request? How can you say no?

"No, you are not worth my time?" No one says that in real life. And if they do, it's not someone you really wanted to talk to anyway.

“No, my experience doesn’t offer any benefit?” You basically said “you’re awesome and I want to learn from you.” Hard to resist.

What they might say is that they are too busy. Successful people tend to be busy by their nature, but they are not busy every second of every day. If they are busy, ask if there is a time when you might be able to schedule a short meeting. Ask if it would be alright to call their secretary to schedule a meeting or even send them an email. You’d be amazed at the kind of people who check their own email and schedule their own appointments who would be happy to meet with you and help you if they can.

There’s one more reason why this person of lofty status might be happy to help you if they can. Pure, unbridled self-interest. People who have gotten to the top know that any good relationship can be valuable. Perhaps you are no one of consequence today, but maybe someday you’ll be a senator or CEO or Worldcon Chairperson or otherwise in a position to return the favor. It becomes even more likely if they give you a bit of advice or an introduction that helps you get there, and they know that.

And to be clear, this is not the Godfather saying that “someday, and this day may never come, I may call upon you to do a service for me.”²⁵ The world doesn’t work that way. It’s simply that the more people you help move forward in their careers and goals, the more people you are in a position to call upon when you might need them.

²⁵ Coppola, and Mario Puzo. The **Godfather**. Hollywood, CA: Paramount Home Video, 1972.

Chapter 9

One To One

You met someone at a networking event and scheduled a one-to-one meeting. Now what?

To be clear, this does not apply to someone you met, even at a networking event, who actually wanted to meet with you about buying your product. If that happens, do your sales appointment thing. This chapter is about the follow up to a networking contact. I say this because the most important rule about a networking one-to-one is...

This is not a sales appointment

You are not trying to sell them. You are not trying to arouse interest in your product. You are not seeking needs that your product might solve. You are not trying to do anything that you might want to do if you were trying to drive towards a sale.

I say this because the purpose of a one-to-one is to develop a relationship with someone you can work together with. An ally. A friend, even. A sales appointment has an adversarial quality. The salesman is trying to make a sale, the prospect is on the defensive. That is antithetical to the networking process.

This does not mean that you won't have people in one-to-ones asking you questions about your product and even asking for pricing, demonstrations, or even closing themselves on buying from you. That's okay if that happens, because they then have a clear need for what you do and they want you to take care of it for them. However, this should only happen if the buyer initiates it.

So, if you aren't selling, what are you doing at this meeting? The purpose of the one-to-one is to find common ground and ways that you can help each other. There are a few areas you will each want to focus on:

- Resources you can offer
- Needs you have
- Ideal referrals you seek
- The strengths and focus of your business

By focusing on these four areas, you will find where one's resources match another's needs, and that is where the real value of networking lies. Maybe you are looking to run a wine tasting fundraiser and I know the owner of a vineyard. Maybe I am looking to make connections with restaurants and your brother just opened one in town.

You want to make sure that the person you are meeting with understands what your business is good at because they will be valuable if they meet someone who might be a good referral for you. It will help them give the referral a reason to get in touch with you, and it will help to guide them as to whether or not this referral plays to your strengths.

A good one-to-one will generally take between 30 minutes and an hour. Why does it take so long? Because it is not a simple presentation. It is an exploration. It takes that long to settle into a conversation and travel into uncommon territory. Maybe your businesses have nothing in common, but one of you is a member of a club or organization that would be of great interest to the other's son or sister or whomever. Those kinds of needs and resources often don't come up during the first 20 minutes, but can shake loose after a good long conversation.

Many of my most valuable moments at one-to-ones occur after we stand up to leave and someone makes an offhand comment. One thing leads to another and we're standing there talking for another 20 minutes. Always be open to that one more thing.

Chapter 10

Monetization Makes the World Go Round

After spending an entire chapter telling you not to mix selling and networking, I will give you this piece of advice. Don't forget to make money.

In 2010, I started working with New York Life as an insurance agent. This was the first time I got very serious about networking and began to develop the Stone Soup Network. I set about meeting all manner of people and creating a comprehensive network. My theory was that if I positioned myself as the “Guy who knows a guy,” I'd get into the information stream and discover opportunities for sales as they developed.

I developed a considerable network in four short months. Unfortunately, my monetization plan was vague. If you remember the Underwear Gnomes of Southpark²⁶, it was a little like that...

Step 1: Networking

Step 2: ????

Step 3: Profit

I actually ran out of money and had to switch jobs before the plan came to fruition. Networking is a powerful tool, but like any tool, it is only as effective as the manner in which it is employed. Just because you build a fantastic network of wonderful people does not mean that money will rain down from the heavens upon you.

Being the clever person that I am, I made a similar mistake in 2014. I was trying to do marketing consulting (or something). I was networking and building great connections, but I did not have a firm plan for how to build a business from it. At least with New York Life, I could theorize that people might need insurance and buy it from me. The second time around, it was more of a vague

²⁶ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gnomes_\(South_Park\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gnomes_(South_Park))

concept that I'd consult in some fashion. It may not surprise you to discover that I returned to selling cars for a year before going to Minuteman and finally being able to put my network to work effectively.

It is important to have a monetization strategy, or you'll be the most popular and well connected homeless person in town. Once you have this strategy, be sure that your networking efforts are in that direction. If your business primarily sells to large companies, then developing a lot of relationships with sole proprietors will be unlikely to pay the bills. This is not to say that you should only network with people you might sell to because you never know where the next ideal connection could come from, but I *am* saying that you must keep your goals in mind. Have a thought in the back of your mind of how the person you are meeting might be able to get you in touch with the people you are looking to meet.

At the least, be sure to ask those that you are meeting with to help you. One mistake I made while working with New York Life was that I was so focused on building a network and knowing what my contacts did that I forgot to ask them "do you know anyone who might be interested in talking about life insurance?" They might have said no, but they were unlikely to say yes without my asking.

Always keep the big financial picture in mind. Be sure you can answer this question: "If you were able to meet everyone you wanted to meet, how would that bring revenues to you?"

Chapter 11

Relationship Selling:

Developing relationships to make sales happen

Relationship selling is a different kind of sale from other types of sales. It is a much more organic sale, and it takes more time, but it generally offers more rewards. Because it is slow and imprecise, this strategy is part of a mix. You will also still want to use the direct approach to many prospects.

Relationship selling means developing relationships, making sure that those contacts understand what you do and what you offer, keeping an ear open for needs that they might have which you could solve, and building a sufficient level of trust and comfort that they will come to you to fulfill those needs as they arise.

One of the ways that this comfort is developed is that you never try to pitch them or close them unless you can clearly demonstrate that you have a solution to a problem that they have. As I discussed in Chapter 9 talking about one to ones, you are not trying to sell *to* someone at that meeting. You are looking to sell *through* them. You want them to understand your business and trust you enough that they might refer someone whom you could help. It just so happens that the person they know that you could help might be them.

Relationship Selling is (not) Dead

For the purposes of this chapter, I'm going to assume you are a salesperson. If you are not a salesperson, then you should still read this chapter, but understand that it may not be focused directly towards your needs. Try to see what knowledge you might glean from it.

I periodically hear some version of “Relationship selling is dead today, everything is transactional.” It may be the “expert”²⁷ who tells you that building relationships is worthless because these days everyone will skip over you to your competitor for a nickel discount on the price. It may be the sales manager, thinking that networking events are a waste of time and money, because they want to *always be closing* and there’s no closing going on at those soirees. It may even be the salesman who just got thrown off for a nickel’s discount from a customer that they thought was a friend.

Well, I certainly hope that nobody tells my customers that relationship selling is dead, because it’s alive and well in my portfolio, and I’m reminded of that approximately two to three times a week when a networking contact will get in touch with me out of the blue to ask about a job that they might need done. In fact, this makes up the bulk of my business.

Here’s the thing, and here’s why a lot of people think relationship selling is dead. Relationships don’t take the place of good salesmanship and good customer service. Someone who knows me might buy from me after getting a price only from me and not shopping around, but they are willing to do that because they trust me to treat them fairly. This means that I must treat them fairly to maintain this trust.

My clients will often have more than one quote and work with me even though my quote is not the lowest. I do not fool myself into thinking that they do this because they love me and I’m their buddy. They do this because they know me. They know about the intangible benefits that I offer. They know that I am easy to contact if they have questions or if things need to be rushed or changed. They know that I will get the job done right the first time. Will the low bidder be on time, to spec, and accommodate special

²⁷ Here defined as someone who writes about selling and has their book actually published by a publishing house and not self publishing... Show off.

needs? Maybe. Maybe not. But they know I will, so the difference in cost is not worth the risk.

I also sometimes have to maintain these relationships at the expense of a single sale. When I sold printing, I would have clients tell me that they can get a job done through some discount site for half what I would charge. Sometimes that's because they used superefficient, high volume machinery which means that we couldn't touch the price. When that happened, I would tell my friend and client that it sounded like they had a very good deal for that job and that I recommend that they take advantage of it, and call us for the next one.

Why would I do this? Because I'm going to lose the job whether I'm gracious or not, but if I'm gracious, then they are not embarrassed to call me the next time they have a need, which maybe I can be more competitive on.

There is one other very important reason to be gracious like this. Sometimes I actually get the job. A friend of mine needed booklets printed. Our initial price was \$1400 for the job. The online place was \$850, which I knew because the client was a friend and told me so. He even sent me the link so I could see for myself and make sure we were comparing apples to apples.

I talked to my boss and determined we could come down to \$1000, but we could go no lower. I told my friend what we would be able to do, and I made it clear that if he wanted to go with the low-price online company, I would completely understand, especially because he had used them before and found their quality and service to be acceptable.

What he said in response was tremendously gratifying. He said that even though they were less expensive, I had taken good care of him on a number of occasions and that the difference in price was so minor that he would rather that the money went to me and take care of *my* family than to go to this other company he had no relationship with.

So, if the message went out that relationship selling is dead, I must have missed it. Maybe my inbox was too full of messages from friends and contacts looking to place orders.

Why Sales Managers Hate Relationship Selling

Sales managers like their salespeople to sell, so it's not entirely accurate to say that they hate relationship selling. If it makes a sale, they like it. However, it's difficult to track, and sales managers really like things they can track.

On day 1, you cold-called the prospect.

On day 4, you returned a quote to them.

On day 7, you followed up with a call.

On day 14, you dropped by and got a follow up quote.

On day 17, you returned the follow up quote.

On day 25, you stopped in again and were told to come back next month.

On day 40, you returned and got an order.

A process was followed, It is clear that the process led to the sale. But what about this progression?

On day 1, you met John through a non-profit committee you were serving on.

On day 22, you ran into John at another event.

On day 35, John told you that Suzy runs a committee that could use your help.

On day 41, you join Suzy's committee and meet Fred.

On day 75, Fred calls you up and tells you to give his friend Jen a call because she needs what you sell.

On day 76, you call Jen.

On day 81, you meet with Jen and tell her about your business.

On day 90, you give Jen a quote.

On day 107, Jen places a very large order.

Your initial contact is lost to history. There was no clear progression. You did not push that sale to occur. It is very easy to look at the second course of events and say that you didn't do

anything to earn that sale. After all, you never “followed up” with them. You didn’t even ask them for their business at any point prior to them contacting you. One might say you just got lucky that they happened to need what you do and they contacted you about it.

I get lucky in that way two or three times a month. I must be awfully lucky!

As the saying goes, the harder I work, the luckier I am.²⁸ It’s not luck. It’s every bit as much of a process as any “road to the sale.” The difference is that it is organic and somewhat slower. It is also so much less adversarial. It also has the advantage that the relationship you develop over time may not only get you the sale but could get you resources for others who might need them and even other resources that you might need.

Let’s look at a real life example of this rambling course. Back when I worked for the print shop, I attended a huge art event in downtown New London called Hygienic Art in January. While I was there, I asked around to learn when New London held its art walk. Towns all over America have art walks, and New London has over 8 galleries right in the downtown, so I naturally assumed I would find a thriving art walk. To my surprise, there had not been one for a number of years, so I took it upon myself to organize one.

During the course of organizing the first one, which was to run in April, I met Alex, one of the owners of the Fog Factory, a vape shop downtown. I didn’t know anything about the vape industry, but Alex educated me a bit about it and told me about an upcoming trade show that would be running a few towns over in April.

I attended the trade show and met some of the leadership of a national vape advocacy group. I talked to them a bit about my business, but nothing came of it right away.

²⁸“I am a great believer in Luck. The harder I work, the more of it I seem to have.” — Coleman Cox, Listen to This

In June, they reached out to me about the possibility of taking on a significant project. That project did not end up coming together, but during the course of the conversation, they told me about a promotional product which was unique to their industry that no one was currently producing, but which the print shop I was working for had the resources to produce.

For the next few weeks, I did the legwork to find a vendor to produce the product.

In September, there was another trade show, and I brought a sell sheet with me advertising the new product, and one of the vendors at the show was very interested in getting it as soon as possible. They placed an order almost immediately. That single order was the third largest single order I had ever received in my time with the company.

And all this because I spent a few hours organizing an art walk. A common course of events, but a little difficult to fit into the “road to the sale.”

The No Close Sale

This is the chapter where all the section headings are a little deceptive. There is still a close in a relationship selling sale, but it's not your typical close.

When your contact reveals that they have a need that you could solve, this is your opportunity to demonstrate that their trust was not misplaced. Seek to understand the need and offer solutions, but in doing make sure that there is absolutely no pressure. If they choose to use your services, then they will be well taken care of, but if they choose to solve the problem in another way, it should be very clear that it will not damage the relationship. Because they know that they have the option to go elsewhere, they often will not stray.

Just because you are not pushing or pressuring does not mean that you should forget how to be a salesperson and simply become a kitten, allowing your contact to run the show. Part of a salesperson's job is to help the customer overcome their own

natural reluctance to make any decision, even the right one. This is not only your right, it is your duty.

Shortly before writing the first edition of this book, I bought a new car from Robert Guffey of Cardinal Honda. I knew Guffey, as he is widely known, because he was in my BNI group. Guffey had invited the members of our group to Cardinal Honda's monthly customer appreciation lunch. Not being one to pass up a free lunch, I attended. Prior to this, Guffey had never seriously talked to me personally about buying a car from him. He didn't ask me what I was driving or other probing questions that might have seemed like he was fishing for an opportunity to get me into his salesy clutches. He made sure that I, and everyone else in our BNI chapter, knew what he did and what made him different from other salespeople, but I never felt he was pursuing me.

During this lunch, since I was comfortable that it would not become an awkward, pressure situation, I talked to Guffey about my current car and situation, a Beetle Convertible that did not suit my needs at all. Not only that, but one of the tires had a slow leak, and replacing the tire would be almost a full car payment. I was still in it because it was a lease and there were only two payments left. I had sold cars before and I knew all the math and it seemed to make sense to just keep the car until it was time to turn it in, even if I had to put air in the tire every few days.

Guffey politely and gently pointed out that those two payments could be rolled into the new payment, and that it would actually not dramatically affect the payments. He didn't try to close me or convince me to move forward, he simply offered me some new suggestions on how I might look at the situation. There was no pressure. In fact, they even offered to have the service department look at my tire and see if there was anything they could do to fix it inexpensively to keep it going for two months. They could have tried to use the tire as a closing tool to convince me that I should act immediately. Instead, they offered to try to fix the tire to remove the urgency.

Three days later, the leaky tire went completely flat... in the rain²⁹. After the miserable experience of changing the tire, I decided that enough was enough. I called him up and told him I was on my way over to finally get that new car.

Had he simply accepted that I had two payments remaining and left it at “I’ll see you in two months,” it is likely I still would have bought from him, but his suggestions pushed me down a path to do something that increased my satisfaction. Once I had the new car, my life was better. I replaced an impractical convertible with a great driving, practical car that even had a lower payment. I am happily in my new car two months earlier and it’s all because Guffey gently pushed me in the right direction while hardly applying any pressure at all.

The Power of the Ask

One of the great things about networking is that it can get you introductions to people you could not otherwise meet. However willing your associates are to help you, they cannot do so if they don’t know what you need, so you may need to tell them.

In BNI, part of the weekly meeting is a 30-60 second presentation on my business and whom I am looking to be introduced to this week. This can be a powerful tool, especially if I have someone specific I am looking to meet. If I have a name I’d like an introduction to, chances are that one of the 25 people in that room knows that person.

Even if you are not in BNI, you can employ “*the ask*”. Look up the person you are looking to meet on LinkedIn or Facebook or Twitter. See what friends you have in common, and ask one of them to introduce you. Even if you can’t determine what friends you have in common, start asking around. As you make your networking rounds, be sure to drop in that question about if they happen to know anyone at the company you are looking to get into or if they know anyone who might know the person you are looking to meet. Sure, many will not be able to help, but chances

²⁹ Much like Guffey’s sales process, there was hardly any pressure.

are that eventually, you will find the connection you need and get that introduction that you could not have moved forward without.

Don't be shy. If there is something that people can do to help you, ask. You'll find that most people are quite willing to help if they possibly can.

I was trying to make contact with a certain local graphic design company. I looked up the head of the company on LinkedIn, and found that his name was John³⁰. I also saw that my friend Susan³¹ was friends with him. I sent her an email in which was something like this:

Susan,

I hope all is going well with you. It was good to see you the other day at the Business After Hours.

I was hoping I might ask a small favor of you. I see on LinkedIn³² that you are friends with John. I think that Minuteman might be able to do some good work for them, and I was hoping you might introduce us with a quick email.

Since Susan is a friend of mine, she was more than happy to help. She sent a very nice email to John introducing me and saying that I was a good person to work with. She mentioned a bit about how she knew me and how we had worked together.

John replied that he would be happy to meet with me, and we set a meeting. That allowed me to sit down with John, discuss some of our strengths, and they have been quoting jobs with us ever since.

All because of one little email.

³⁰ Not his real name.

³¹ Not her real name.

³² That is the real name of the site.

Chapter 12

Social Media:

You're probably wrong about it

I have encountered a number of people who say that they are good at social media, and I have encountered many who say that they do not understand it. The correlation between one's perception of their social media talent and their actual social media talent is remarkably weak.

The first group reminds me of a study that I read about that said that 80% of drivers believe that they are above average. Statistically at least 30% of those people are wrong, but I would put that number closer to 40% being wrong because overconfidence leads to avoiding opportunities to learn and become better. Whether it's driving or social media, if you think you know all there is to know, you will not seek to improve. Why improve? You're already perfect.

On the other hand, there are people who consider themselves poor drivers but who have managed to avoid having an accident for a decade or more. They lack confidence, but clearly not ability.

I consider myself conversant with social media, not an expert. Social media is such a fast changing environment that by the time you read this, strategies will be notably different than they are on the day I write it. I certainly do not consider this to be a definitive resource on social media strategy. For that, I recommend you pick up Jab, Jab, Jab, Right Hook by Gary Vaynerchuk³³. This chapter is simply a couple of basic suggestions to put you on the right track.

³³ Vaynerchuk, Gary. *Jab, Jab, Jab, Right Hook: How to Tell Your Story in a Noisy Social World*. Harper Business, an Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2013.

For those who think they are social media experts, here's a test. If you have a website that you'd like to get people to check out, how many people can you get to visit it based on your recommendation? Try it. Use your own blog³⁴, which hopefully has good metrics. Post a link to an interesting article on it and see how much traffic you can draw. Is it dozens? Is it hundreds? Is it thousands? Now consider that the average conversion rate is 1-5%. So, if that site were meant to sell something or draw people to an event, approximately 1-5% of that number would do the thing you were looking to make them do. How impressed are you with 1% of the traffic that you drew?

I work with a company that connects customers with vendors, and they are always looking for partners with good social media reach. Generally, 10,000+ is around the threshold where it makes sense to partner³⁵. Below that, it's probably not enough people to draw the traffic that makes it worth the effort, but perhaps you only have 1,000 followers but they hang on your every word, then it would make sense. Your number of followers means nothing. How many of them you can motivate to action means everything.

It's not a Billboard, It's a Conversation

What is the #1 way that most companies do social media wrong? They use it like traditional media. If you are making a TV ad, the ad talks at the audience, throws some information at them and hopes they act on it. Furthermore, a TV or radio ad is focused: "We sell stuff for great prices. Our stuff is great. Come buy our stuff. Here's a deal on our stuff!"

You see this all the time. The Twitter feed that's just a series of coupons and come ons. The Facebook page that is just image files of the company's newspaper ads. It's not impressive to customers, and it doesn't work. In fact, it may even work against a

³⁴ If you don't have a blog, even a poorly maintained one, don't tell me you are a social media expert.

³⁵ If that's you, get in touch with me. I've got something you'll be very interested in.

company, since it gives them the image of being interested in nothing more than reaching into your pocket.

The most effective social media marketing is interactive. It takes advantage of the unique benefits of social media to develop a meaningful relationship with customers. This means making posts that customers can interact with. For example, in September, a company might post “Fall is coming, how do you use our product as the weather turns cooler?” People can then comment, and the company can reply to the comments. The actual person writing those replies might be an intern in the marketing department, but the customer will feel like they are having a conversation with the brand. After all, as the saying goes: “on the Internet, no one knows you’re a dog”.³⁶

Social media can also be a powerful customer service tool. There are many customers who either tried to contact the company with a complaint and did not get a good response or simply didn’t bother to contact the company. In the old days, this customer might just quietly seethe and complain to a couple friends.

Not so today. Now they can complain all across social media. Some companies see this as a threat, but really it is an opportunity. Most social media platforms give you a way to search for your company’s name. To engage effectively, your company should be vigilant for mentions, whether positive or negative, and should engage with those who mention you. For those who are speaking positively, it will encourage them to do so more often and strengthen their loyalty. For those who are speaking negatively, it will give you a second chance to address the problem.

Many complaints are simple to address. Most customers don’t want much. They just want what they think is owed to them.

³⁶ Steiner, Peter. “On the Internet, Nobody Knows You’re a Dog.” Cartoon. The New Yorker 5 July, 1993, Wikipedia. Web 6 Oct. 2020.

In 1999, Mel Gibson starred in a movie called *Payback*.³⁷ He plays a character named Porter who is betrayed by his wife and his crime partner and cheated out of \$70,000 that he rightfully stole. He proceeds to tear an entire criminal syndicate apart to get his \$70,000. This dialog sums it up:

Fairfax: What are you doing this for, man? Is it the principle of the thing?

Porter: Stop it, I'm getting misty...And tell him it's \$70,000!

Fairfax: \$70,000? Hell, my suits are worth more than that!

For some people it's much, much less that they are upset over. When I got my last phone upgrade, I got a protective case with an enhanced battery for \$100 from a company called Mophie. After a year, the battery backup stopped working properly. I contacted them to try to activate the warranty. They told me that I would have to mail them the case and wait one to two weeks while they analyzed it to determine if it was eligible for a warranty replacement, and if it did not qualify, I'd have to pay shipping to have it shipped back to me. This being my phone case, I can't very well leave my phone unprotected for two weeks. Phones these days are like carrying a piece of porcelain in your pocket, so I found that unacceptable. After 5 emails and a phone call, they agreed that they'd be willing to take my credit card number and send me a new case, then I could send them back the old case, and if they felt the old case did not qualify, then they'd charge me full retail for the new case.

Naturally, this offer was unacceptable because I have no intention of ever buying anything from Mophie again. So, instead of letting them trick me into buying another case, I told the story

³⁷ *Payback*. Directed by Brian Helgeland, performances by Mel Gibson and James Coburn, Paramount Pictures, 1999.

on social media, as well as in my upcoming book on networking that you are reading right now.³⁸

Had Mophie been dedicated to effective social media marketing, they could have had an opportunity to reach out to me when I made my posts. Perhaps they might have noticed my ire and reached out to me to see if they could help me out. Some people complain quietly and some complain loudly. I recommend that a company satisfy all customers, but you at least want to satisfy those who are sure to be heard. Social media gives you the chance to see who those people are and at least try to convert them into happy customers with special contact and treatment.

There's no zealot like a convert.

Yes, This Will Be on the Test

In addition to your business social media accounts you also have a personal social media account, and if you are part of a small business, or in a prominent position in a large company, people will look at your personal posts as well as those of the business. They will reflect on your business. There is no firewall between your personal and your business posts. People can find your personal accounts with minimal effort and what it posted on one will reflect on the other.

I often engage with people on social media as an initial contact. I often find people referring to posts that I have made recently in the conversation. You can assume that anyone you are connecting with will look at your last dozen or so posts.

Do an audit of your social media accounts. If someone were to judge you based on the last dozen posts, what would they think of you? Is that the image you'd like to project?

In some cases, such as political and maybe even religious posts, you may feel that it is worth potentially alienating some

³⁸ Never assume that you can blow off even one customer, because you never know if that customer is the author with the large social media following.

customers for the benefit of endorsing your views. If that is your choice, that is not an unreasonable choice.

However, too many people simply don't think about the consequences of their posts.

In 2020, there's a new trend to be aware of. Memes are being used as sophisticated strategy for spreading ideas and planting concepts in the public. Memes will be created that will resonate with a certain audience which are offensive to other audiences. People will share these memes because they agree with an element of it, not realizing that they are offending some people.

Some believe that these memes are actually created intentionally to create division. As a business person, you certainly don't want to be driving people away because you thought a meme was funny.

If you have a message you'd like to share, create it yourself. Write a post. Better yet, wrote a blog article and link to your article. It provides more credibility, it is less likely to offend by accident or advance someone else's agenda, and it drives traffic to your blog.

Public Means Everyone Sees It

A good friend of mine is always forwarding me screenshots of posts that a business owner friend of hers posts. The individual in question owns a retail shop in a downtown area of a smaller town. It's the kind of place where word tends to get around.

This individual will often make posts that make fun of or complain about customers. He does not do it by name, but his descriptions are clear enough that one might be able to recognize oneself in the post. Even if you don't know that a post is about you, seeing that the business owner is making fun of some customers makes it clear that their next nasty post could be about you.

This is an extreme example. Most people do not make the obvious mistake of posting negative things about customers and employees, but they do often post other unfavorable things. Unsavory, racist, or insulting humor; posts that are insulting to certain groups of people or people of a given ideology; and

generally posts that make it seem they are unhappy running their business. All of these things can give a potential customer a negative impression of the business owner and their business.

You are graded on everything that you put online. It all counts.

Chapter 13

Getting a Job with Networking without a Network

I initially called this chapter “Getting a Job with Networking,” and left out the last three words. Without the last three words, this chapter would read like this.

If you would like to get a job with networking, make sure everyone in your network knows that you are looking for a job, what your qualifications are, and what you are looking for in a job. Then, respond to the job offers you get and accept the best one.

That’s the power of networking. If you have a strong, vibrant network of people you have developed good relationships with, at least one of them knows of a good job opening at any given time. So, it’s simply a matter of mobilizing that network to let them know that you have a need and they will work to help you as they can.

What if you don’t have that kind of network yet? Maybe you are new to an area. Maybe you just haven’t done the network development and you don’t have a year or two to wait while you build your network. What do you do to make something happen right now?

First, let’s frame the problem you are facing. You need a job, but you probably have a specific type of job you’d really like. Let’s say you’d really like to be a funeral director³⁹, but you don’t

³⁹ That seems like an odd choice for an example, but this system was actually developed when a friend of mine came to me and told me that he wished to one day become a funeral director and did not know where to start. I know very little about the funeral industry, and part of the point is that this system works even if you do not know much about the industry you are trying to get into.

know where to start. Obviously, you are not going to jump right into being a director, but some role in the industry where you could learn the ropes and earn the certifications is where you really want to be. Such jobs clearly exist and most likely there is one open at this time. If a job is open, then someone must know about it and someone must have the authority to hire for it.

So, what is your objective? It is to find the person who can hire you for that job. That seems a bit more manageable than the needle in a haystack task of trying to find a job, doesn't it?

Now, it is time to systematize your search. I am assuming that you are not currently working full time. If you are, then you'll have to adjust the process somewhat to fit your availability. I am also assuming that you know no one. If you already have some contacts, take advantage of that to jump start the process.

To get started, make a list of various professions and individuals, if you know of any, who might have knowledge of the industry you are trying to get into. For the funeral director, example, you'd want to think of any roles that come into contact with mortally challenged individuals. Other funeral directors would be top of that list, but you could also speak to morticians, medical examiners, nurses, doctors, police officers, other first responders, estate planners, life insurance agents and brokers, hospice workers, florists, etc.

Now start approaching anyone you can find who is in these professions. Tell them that you are looking to learn about the funeral industry and that you believe that their knowledge and experience would be of great value to you and that you would like to arrange to take 10-20 minutes of their time to get their advice and benefit from their knowledge.

This approach is very flattering. You are not asking anything of them except for their time, and you are telling them that you feel they are an expert relative to you. People are rarely treated as experts and many will jump at the chance to act as one.

You will find that 30-50% of the people you approach in this way will be willing to meet with you.⁴⁰

When you meet with them, ask them to share their knowledge. Take notes on the answers. This part is very important: after you ask a question **shut up!** Let them speak and **do not argue with them.** It doesn't matter if you are absolutely sure that you know better. Don't tell them. Just write down what they say, and let them be the expert. The only thing you have to offer them for their time is your appreciation. If you question or doubt them, you are not providing that value and you will leave a sour taste in their mouth and they will be less likely to help you find the next step in your journey.

In many of these meetings, the person you meet with may start to think of your problem as their problem and start trying to find ways to help solve it. Be sure to ask who they know whom you should speak to next. If possible, have them make an introduction.

Put numbers to work. Approach 10 people per day to ask for such a meeting with a goal of setting 5 meetings. Some might meet with you right away, others might schedule for a later day or week. Don't give up for the day until you have 5 meetings set.

If you do this for a month, you will have approached about 220 people and met with about 80. This means that there are now 80 people that you have established some kind of relationship with. 80 people who know who you are, have a positive impression of you (because you made them feel good about themselves), and who know what you are looking for.

By 2 months, the total number of meetings should be closer to 200. Out of 200 people in and around an industry, at least one of them should be able to offer you a job or direct you to someone who can, and likely it will happen far sooner than 200.

The most important things are that you make the people you meet with feel like experts and not like you are trying to pitch

⁴⁰ This goes back to the scientists being asked to the Sci-fi convention that we discussed in Chapter 8.

them anything and that you maintain the activity levels of setting 5 meetings per day.

It's very easy to feel that you are doing a lot when you are really just spinning your wheels. I'll talk to people who are looking for a job and ask them what they did today. They'll tell me they sent out 8 resumes. Back in my resume sending days, I could send out 8 resumes before I finished my coffee in the morning. What did they do with the rest of their day? Setting 5 meetings may well take half your day, but if you are really dedicated to a job search, it should be a 40 hour a week activity, and having specific and measurable activity goals is crucial for making sure that you are really making good use of that time.

Chapter 14

Why Write a Book that You Don't Expect to Make Money On

You meet one of two people. One is Michael Whitehouse, printing salesman, and the other is Michael Whitehouse, author of Guy Who Knows a Guy. Who are you more interested in talking to? Who would you like to meet up with later in the week?

If you are like most people, it would be the author. Salesmen are a dime a dozen. But authors? How often do you meet an author? For all you know, the book I wrote contains the phrase “I am a baked potato” 22,000 times between two attractive covers. Doesn't matter. Being an author comes with a certain esteem.

I hope that you have found the advice in this book to be valuable, and I hope that tens of thousands of people buy it, but before any of that this book has a value to me because it allows me to carry the title of author.

For better or worse, marketing is all about perception. I have seen fantastic companies that did not draw the market that they should because they did not create the proper perceptions. I have seen terrible companies sell like gangbusters because they mastered the perception game.

In The Psychology of Selling⁴¹, Brian Tracy speaks about the principle of the “Winning Edge.”⁴² The concept is that tiny advantages can lead to massive results. Maybe one salesman made one extra follow up call⁴³ or was just a little better prepared or even had a nicer looking tie when he met with the prospect. This

⁴¹ Tracy, Brian. *The Psychology of Selling: Increase Your Sales Faster and Easier Than You Ever Thought Possible*. Harper Collins Leadership, 2006.

⁴² <http://www.briantracy.com/blog/sales-success/the-winning-edge/>

⁴³ This is the Plus One concept, which you can learn more about in my podcast, “Michael's Motivation”, available on Anchor, Spotify, and many other podcast platforms.

small edge may have made the difference between 100% of the commission and 0% of the commission. The salesman who got the order wasn't 100% better. He probably wasn't even 20% better, but he got 100% of the sale.

In the market I sold printing in, there were at least 4 other printers who were comparable to us: similar quality, price, service, capabilities. We had some advantages over them and they had some over us, but for the most part they were hard to distinguish by the prospect. How did I earn business in this crowded market? I made myself the differentiating factor.

I am always seeking ways to personally create value. This means developing relationships. This means using my connections to benefit those whom I might wish to do business with. And this means finding ways to differentiate myself like becoming an author and radio show host.

Think of ways that you can differentiate yourself. Do you give a good talk? Most local Rotary clubs and other similar organizations are looking for speakers. Go speak there, and if you do it enough, you can call yourself a Speaker.⁴⁴ Do you know enough about a topic to write 20,000 words? Write a book. Now you are an author.⁴⁵

The perception that an *author* is an evolutionary step above comes of the fact that people often ascribe certain superhuman traits to those in esteemed roles. If someone is an author or CEO or Governor, they must be superior in other ways.

As I discussed a few chapters back, people are people. It doesn't matter if someone is an author, CEO, governor or President of the United States. Everyone has doubts, fears, physical maladies, embarrassing histories, mistakes in their past, mistakes in their future, and all the rest that makes us all human. When you read the letters and diaries of the great people of

⁴⁴ Toastmasters is a great resource for improving your speaking if you have difficulty or are just looking to get feedback.

⁴⁵ Not sure how to get started writing your book? Contact my friend Lisa Saunders who consults on helping people to discover the book within them. <http://www.authorlisasaunders.com/>

history, you find that they all had doubts and lost faith at one time or another. You will also find that they have all had moments of despair and failure to offset their glory.

Chances are that there is some topic that you know enough about to write 20,000 intelligent words about. It doesn't have to be your business. Maybe you know a lot about knitting or fishing or 17th century men's fashion. Write the book. Be an author. Discover that you are better than you thought you were.

And if you have any trouble, give Lisa Saunders a call. She'll help you out.

What Writing a Book Did For Me

Every day, I post a video that starts with "I'm Michael Whitehouse, the Guy Who Knows A Guy."⁴⁶

After this book came out, I started giving it away as a raffle prize at networking events to gain awareness. I created an email list giving a weekly update of networking events in the area. I created my website at www.guywhoknowsaguy.com.

At networking events, people started introducing me as The Guy Who Knows A Guy.

Three years later, I now work full time as a professional coach under the brand name of The Guy Who Knows A Guy. My business branding is based on the original design of the cover of this book.

But it all started with the original version of this book I published in 2017. The book gave me the credibility to begin building a personal brand which would eventually build into a business.

What can writing a book do for you?

⁴⁶ Find them on YouTube at youtube.guywhoknowsaguy.com

Chapter 15

Nobody Is Unimportant

In addition to being a networker, marketer and salesman, I am also a big fan of strategy board games. I don't get to play them as much as I used to, but I was an avid player in high school and college.

One particular event during one of these games was quite instructive and taught me a lesson which I would never forget. The game was Supremacy, a game from the 80s that simulated nuclear age geopolitics.

It is a game of strategy, tactics, and diplomacy. No one wins alone. You can only win through effective alliances.

Early in this game, Nathan approached me for an alliance. I looked at the game board and saw that Nathan did not seem to have a strong position. I returned to Nathan, and, with all the bravado a 15 year old could muster, said, "come back to me when you have something to offer."

He did. About 6 turns later, Nathan's forces swept mine from the board and eliminated me from the game.

There is a very valuable lesson in this. No matter how unimportant someone may seem, no one you meet is ever unimportant. Perhaps it's a CEO of a significant company dressed down for the evening. Maybe the individual has important contacts. Or maybe the person you think little of today will be in a much different place 6 turns, er, years from now.

It is easy to treat every person you meet with respect, and the cost of not doing so can be significant.

"In my walks, every man I meet is my superior in some way, and in that I learn from him."

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

Bonus Content

As I was putting together the revised edition of *The Guy Who Knows A Guy*, one of the things I wanted to do was put the title on the spine of the cover, an oversight in the first edition.

Turned out that a book has to be at least 99 pages long to get the privilege of the title on the spine.

The publisher's arbitrary rules are your gain as I present you 18 pages of bonus content. Some of this content has previously appeared in my blog, other is entirely new and exclusive to this book.

All for the same price as the original 76 page edition.
Such a deal!

Bonus #1:

Networking In Virtual Times

Or

How to Go Around the World

Without Leaving Your House

When the quarantine of 2020 first came upon us all, every organization adapted by replacing their in person meetings with virtual meetings. Some organizations saw this as an inferior, temporary measure, but others looking for the silver lining in this stormcloud.

One organization I belong to is Toastmasters. Toastmasters is an organization dedicated to teaching speaking and leadership skills. They realized that virtual presentations and meetings were here to stay, and the unique skills it takes to present and lead meetings virtually are absolutely something that members could benefit from.

I have always made a habit of visiting different BNI meetings when I have the opportunity, but I was always limited by geography. There were only a handful of meetings that were reasonable to drive to for a 7 AM meeting.

Suddenly, geography was no longer a factor. I could visit a BNI meeting anywhere.

I visited a BNI group in Malaysia called Millenium BNI that ran such a great meeting you would think there was a TV producer organizing it.

I visited a group in Melbourne at the height of their lockdown, granting me a unique insight into another culture and how they were managing the pandemic.

I visited a group in Washington state and met the indomitable networker Jonathan Milligan who has personally

made over half a dozen introductions to me that have brought value⁴⁷.

I went from being a guy who knows a guy in southeast New England to being a guy who knows a guy everywhere.

Some BNI groups have found it so effective and convenient to meet online that they intend to continue doing so when the pandemic ends.

Most groups will return to in person meetings when we return to in person activities, but that doesn't mean that the opportunities for virtual networking around the world will end.

A new kind of virtual speed networking event has proliferated in the pandemic environment.

Reconstructing a live experience virtually requires thinking more critically about what makes a networking event work and what a networking event fundamentally is.

Fundamentally, a networking event is a place where people gather in quantity to make connections individually. A business after hours puts a number of people into a room, then they collect in groups of two to five to make their connections.

When the world moved onto Zoom, it was clear that 100 people in a Zoom room was not a good networking event. However, Zoom has a breakout room functionality. People can be randomly assigned into breakout rooms creating something very much like speed networking in which networkers are paired up randomly for a few minutes to make the maximum number of connections in the minimum time.

This virtual version is commonly called Virtual Speed Networking. It is a good way to make new connections. From your conversation of a few minutes, you determine if you want to have a longer follow up one to one.

Some virtual speed networking events just toss people into rooms, while others like Gabe O'Neill's Digital Accelerant⁴⁸ have

⁴⁷ So far. No doubt there's more to come.

⁴⁸ <https://digitalaccelerant.com/network.htm>

some great production value with drawings, giveaways, featured content and more.

Because all it takes to organize a virtual networking event like this is a \$15 a month paid Zoom account, they are proliferating. Of course, it takes work to build up the brand and get a good following to attend on a weekly basis, but that's just a matter of time and effort.

As I write this, live networking events are not yet returning, but I believe that virtual networking is here to stay. These events give people a chance to connect with others around the country and around the world. That is too powerful a tool to abandon.

In February of 2021, I ran the first Conference21⁴⁹, a virtual conference and networking event that brought together 30 speakers from around North America in a unique platform that captured all the best parts of an in person conference in the virtual space.

Rather than spending hundreds or thousands of dollars to travel to a live event, one can attend Conference21 from the comfort of their home or office with minimal cost.

The unique technology of the platform allows attendees and speakers to mix and mingle before, after, and between talks just like you could in the hallway of a live event.

While there are plans to create hybrid versions of Conference21 that combine in-person and virtual, there are no plans to ever abandon the virtual roots. There is simply no way to bring together the diversity to voices and expertise so affordably any other way than a virtual event.

Our economy has been globally connected for decades, but, for most of us, our networks have still been geographically constrained.

⁴⁹ www.conference21.com

One of the greatest things to come out of the most tumultuous year of 2020 is the near universal adoption of these virtual technologies.

Video conferencing and webinars have been around for many years, but they were only used in a particular niche.

Once we were forced to adopt them, we have seen the power they have, and I believe that we will see an incredible proliferation of connections among people around the world in the coming years.

Bonus #2:

My Mission

The following is an article I wrote and shared on my blog⁵⁰ on October 28th, 2021 as I was really getting serious about coaching.

Imagine if every honest, hard worker never feared losing their job because they knew they could get another one.

Imagine if everyone understood the power of the Internet in the modern economy to allow them to create their own living through entrepreneurship.

Over the last few months building my coaching business, I have come to recognize that I am driven by more than the desire to make money and get clients.

I am driven by a mission. That mission is to change the world by changing the way that people make their living. That is why I give away so much content for free.

I know too many people who struggle to survive, living paycheck to paycheck and falling deeper and deeper into debt. They know no other way. They don't realize that they could take the very skills they already have, sell them on the open market, and support themselves.

Advocates fight for higher minimum wages and labor regulations, but it's a losing game. As the wages rise, the cost of living rises with them.

The Guy Who Knows A Guy's Mission

I want you to help me change the world.

What if instead of regulation, everyone knew their true economic value. Imagine if every American knew that they could launch a \$500/week online business designing web sites, copy writing, virtual assisting, tutoring, or any number of other ways made possible by technology. There are people out there making

⁵⁰ www.guywhoknowsaguy.com/blog

\$2,500 per client per month to manage their social media. Do you think they have a degree in social media marketing? They do not.

If everyone held that alternative in their back pocket, minimum wage would be irrelevant. Why work for \$7.25 per hour when you can make a single web site and earn more than you'd get in a week at the job?

Not everyone can or will start a business, but if even a modest percentage of people exit the low wage labor market, it will create supply shortage which will drive up wages naturally. It helps those who can start their own businesses, and those who cannot.

Starting your own business isn't easy, but struggling in a soul crushing minimum wage job isn't easy either. So, if you're going to choose one hard path, shouldn't it be the one that leads to independence.

This is my mission. This is the through line of all the work I do, whether it's teaching networking skills, coaching job seekers, working with entrepreneurs, inspiring through my Motivational Minutes, my podcast, or my speaking. It is all about empowering people to take control of their own economic destiny, whether that means starting their own business, side-hustling, or simply shifting the workplace power dynamic.

This is a revolution that creates no losers. Workers increase their standard of living, creating more economic value and having more money to spend, which they circulate into the economy, creating more economic activity benefiting workers and industrialists alike.

This is my mission. To change the world, by returning power to people through economic empowerment rather than regulation.

Imagine what a world that would be.

Bonus #3

Networking Through Volunteering

This article was originally shared on my blog on December 22nd, 2018

There are all kinds of great reasons to volunteer. It does good for the community. You can set a good example for your children. It supports causes you care about. Volunteering can also be a great way to build your network if you do it right.

I hope that you are volunteering for more reasons than simply to build your network. You may take on different volunteering opportunities for different reasons. The purpose of this article, however, is to discuss how to make volunteerism a part of your networking strategy. This is a win-win because it helps you to build your resources while also doing something positive for the community. I hope that, as your network grows and your resources increase, you will take advantage of those resources to give back in other ways.

A purist may look at this and suggest that I am corrupting the purity of volunteerism by doing something so crass as trying to derive benefit from it. However, everyone who volunteers does it to gain something. It may be a good feeling. They may seek the respect of their boss, neighbors, or family. Perhaps they desire exposure. It may be fun or a feeling of importance. Connections could be the goal.

In this article, we're focusing on the last of these. My hope is that you will learn ways to make the most of your volunteering so that you can do the most good and so that you will want to keep doing it.

Whatever the benefit, nobody does anything that they aren't getting anything out of, an important lesson for anyone seeking to recruit and retain volunteers, but that's a discussion for another article.

Volunteering on work time

There are many wonderful ways you can volunteer that do incredible things for people who need your help that will not help your network. I hope you will do those things as well. They can return dividends far greater than the greatest business success. These are wonderful things to do, and I hope you will dedicate some personal time to helping.

What I'm talking about here is the kind of volunteerism that justifies taking "work time" and dedicating it to volunteer efforts. Your time is very valuable, and if you are to spend it on anything, you should have an expectation of return.

This concept that volunteering is good for your business is well known, but too many people do not stop to think about where it will provide the most benefit. They put their efforts into the wrong places. Tragically, they conclude that helping the community does not help their business. In fact, it does, but only if done the right way.

Ultimately, in any networking activity, it is all about whom you might meet in your work. If you are tutoring children, it is very rewarding work, but your time will be spent with children. These children are likely not well connected in the business community.

So, in addition to your tutoring work, how could you help these children and build your network at the same time? You could serve on the board of the organization that supports the tutoring. Your network and other skills could support the organization or help in fundraising efforts.

Here are three key things to consider when allocating your on-the-clock volunteering efforts.

- Spend time with the people you want to connect with.
- Make the most efficient use of your time.
- Support causes that you care about and enjoy working on.
- Spend time with those you want to connect with

Just like any networking effort, you want to make sure you are connecting with the right people. If you are looking to connect

with business owners and people of influence in the community, you may find that a non-profit board of directors or event committee is an excellent place to be.

Take a look at the composition of the board of any major non profit organization in your community. What an amazing group of people, all donating their time to support this cause. If you are a business owner who is looking to build your business in a community, it is not a question of whether you will join a non profit board, but a question of which one(s) and how many.

If you are still building your business or career, you may not have great financial resources to contribute to a cause. You may not have extensive experience. What you do have is time to contribute. If an attorney whose time bills out at \$350/hr can make time to serve, you can too, and your time could be just as valuable to the organization as the attorney's.

By supporting great causes, you will make connections and build relationships in a non-business context. The more points of contact you have with a person, in other words the more you have done together, the stronger your relationship will be.

Make efficient use of your time

Many people in business would love to make volunteering a part of their networking strategy but feel that they don't have the time. Chances are that there is something you have to offer which you have a relative advantage in. In other words, there is something you could do in 20 minutes which would take someone else hours of research and planning to do.

Dinner In the Dark

I serve on the event committee of an incredible organization called Sofia Sees Hope⁵¹. We run Dinner in the Dark which raises over \$150,000 in one night to work towards a cure for Leber congenital amaurosis (LCA).

⁵¹ <https://sofiasees.org/>

Like most of you reading this, my time is at a premium, but I am able to leverage my 20 years of event experience and my network for Dinner in the Dark. I attend the event committee meeting and listen for areas of difficulty I might be able to assist with.

As it turns out, I was able to be most valuable because one my connection⁵² to a now defunct company called Such Publicity which created a service which created a live slideshow from an Instagram feed. We were able to use this to create an exciting and unique experience at the dance after the dinner. For anyone else to do this would have taken many hours of research. For me, it took an email.

After Such Publicity shut down, I was able to leverage my technical experience to find an alternate solution that worked just as well without needing the third party service. We kept the party on the big screen, and I had fun doing it.

I worked my network and experience to help bring some fun elements to an event that raises money to help children get their vision back. In the process, I made connections that built my network to give me greater resources to help others in the future. What a great return on investment!

The Renaissance Gala

In another case, which I discuss in my book *The Guy Who Knows a Guy*⁵³, I was working with a local Rotary club who was planning a Renaissance themed gala dinner. They had a great idea, but they had no idea where to find suitable performers. I happened to meet one of the organizers at a networking event. During the course of conversation he mentioned his challenge.

“How many do you need?” I asked.

“What?”

⁵² Are you surprised that my most valuable asset turned out to be a connection in my network?

⁵³ You can find this book in your hands right now.

“How many performers do you need? Five? A dozen? I could probably find two dozen, but it would take more work.”

“Um, two. We really need two.”

I connected him with three and they were able to choose the two that worked best. It ended up being an incredible event, made all the better with fantastic entertainment.

The whole effort took me less than half an hour. It saved them countless hours of research and hunting around, probably getting them much higher quality performers in the process.

Support causes that you care about

There is no guarantee that you will ever see a business benefit from volunteering. If you are giving your time and resources, you should give them to a cause you feel good supporting. This prevents the idea that you “wasted your time” if you don’t see a return. If you want to invest, buy a restaurant. While there is likely a benefit to your network, your primary purpose in volunteering should be the work itself.

That said, your payoff could also be your enjoyment of the work. Personally, I love helping run events. It’s fun for me, especially well run events. This is why I work with Dinner in the Dark. LCA is not necessarily a cause that I’m personally passionate about, but allowing children to regain their sight is a great cause, and the team that Laura Manfre has built at Sofia Sees Hope is a joy to work with.

That’s the real key. There are things that you will have to do in business that you don’t like, maybe even dread. If your volunteer work is one of those things, you’re doing it wrong. There may be some hard or unpleasant work, but the overall experience of volunteering should be positive before any business or networking considerations come into the conversation.

Bonus #3

Buying a House The Guy Who Knows A Guy Way

House buying can be a stressful process. Most of us don't do it very often, so everything is new, but it is one of the largest and most important purchases most of us will ever make.

One mistake can cause us to miss out on our dream home, or, worse, trap us in a money pit nightmare.

Add to this stress the fact that most people who buy a house are working with strangers. Does your Realtor really know what they're talking about? Is your mortgage guy working for your best interest or their own? Does your attorney know what all those papers you're signing mean?

In late 2020, my family bought our first home, but we did it The Guy Who Knows A Guy way.

With two exceptions (the UHaul rental guy and the septic guy - who was known to the seller) we had networking relationships with every single person involved in the process.

In Chapter 11, I discussed how much easier it is to buy a car from someone I know and trust. Buying a house is like that, but times a hundred.

In late 2019, we started down the long road to home ownership. I spoke to Molly Bruno⁵⁴, who had been introduced to me a few years earlier and was a sponsor of a magazine a published, to learn what we would need to do.

Realtors are often hesitant to take someone out looking at houses before they have secured financing because they might years away from actually doing anything. Knowing what I know about the real estate business, I explained that we're not ready to act for at least a year, but she insisted we come see a few houses anyway to get a better idea of what's out there.

⁵⁴ <http://www.mollybrunorealestate.com/>

Window shopping for houses? Sure.

Because the trust was already established, she house looking was a fun process.

I had also started speaking to Mike Mish about mortgages and what it would take for us to get one. We had some credit challenges to conquer before we'd be able to make a move. I knew Mike from my BNI group, and because we had an existing rapport, I was comfortable sharing out credit situation with him. I knew that he would provide advice that was in our best interest, not just his.

He was able to run our credit and give us a clear course of action to get from where we were to where we needed to be. He was also able to explain the bewildering array of options in mortgages, so we knew what we'd be looking at in terms of payments and money down when the time came.

Having trust meant that we didn't have to double check everything he said, and that was a great relief to us.

Anyone can know Realtors and mortgage guys, but next level networking is knowing the seller.

Like many aspects of life, I will often find my wife able to pull off some amazing networking coups without even trying.

Some years ago, she had connected with a woman who owned a house and rented out rooms when she bought an old changing table we were getting rid of.

Because she works in management of local apartment community, there would be times when someone would come looking to rent a room and it would be better fit to refer them to this private landlord than to rent them a whole apartment.

In 2020, this woman was looking to sell her house but was having some issue with some tenants that didn't want to move out, so she asked my wife for help.

The most she looked at the house, the more she thought that it was a pretty good fit for what we were looking for. Eventually, we both looked at it and decided it was a great find for us.

This was a win win. We were able to get a house that really suited us well in a housing market where it was almost impossible to get an offer accepted while the seller was able to know that the house she raised her kids in would be in the loving hands of friends.

As the process of repairing our credit went on, another networking contact, David Haberfeld, a real estate investor whom I've interviewed on my podcast⁵⁵ a couple times, recommended a resource called Lexington Law⁵⁶.

They are a firm that interrogates every negative item on your credit report and makes many of them go away. My credit went up 160 points in two months of working with them.

David's recommendation cleared the road to be able to get the mortgage.

The countdown to home buying began!

Once there is an accepted offer on a house, a few things need to happen. The house has to be inspected, you have to get insurance, and you need to do the piles of paperwork to execute the transfer.

The inspection was done by Kyle Clark of National Property Inspections⁵⁷. I met Kyle through Rotary. He ended up becoming one of my first coaching clients, and I hired him to do the inspection of our house.

The job of a home inspector is to look at a house I don't know to find things I don't know how to look for and wouldn't recognize if I saw them. There's a fair amount of trust involved, plus the fact that rapport is important. Knowing very little about

⁵⁵ Hear his story on Episode 24

(guywhoknowsaguy.com/2020/06/13/podcast-david-haberfeld) and Episode 45

(guywhoknowsaguy.com/2020/11/03/david-haberfeld-podcast/)

⁵⁶ www.lexingtonlaw.com

⁵⁷ <https://npiweb.com/newlondoncounty/>

what we're doing, it's important that I could be comfortable asking questions.

Part of the inspection was that someone had to come look at the septic system. This person was a stranger to us, but he was known to the seller, and the seller was trusted by us, so it sort of counts.

Homeowners insurance is a strange and arcane field. If water comes up out of the ground, it is a different kind of casualty covered by a different kind of insurance than if water comes out of a pipe or falls from the sky.

I turned to Mark Spinnato, who I knew from my BNI group. I did not need to understand every nuance of what we were getting because I could trust that Mark did. This is especially important with insurance. When you buy insurance you are literally buying a promise. A promise that if something goes wrong, they'll be there.

Having an agent I have a relationship with means that, should I ever have a need, I have a live human being I can get on the phone to help me, not a call center. Having a networking relationship means that I know other people who have had claims and I've heard how he was able to help them.

Leading up to the closing, there was a lot to figure out with the mortgage. We were cleaning up our credit as the closing date was approaching, and, to make life a little more complicated, the main focus of my business shifted halfway through.

While my employer was still *technically* the same company, as I am self employed, the bank didn't exactly see it that way.

In light of the pandemic, all of the mortgage documents we signed were digital. With all the changes and pivots and restrategizations in the process, there was a constant flow of documents back and forth. We must have signed half a dozen applications for different variations of the loan.

Most of these documents were absolutely gibberish to me. Had I not trusted our loan officer, I would have needed to get a lengthy email or even a phone call every time I signed something new. We've all heard those stories of mortgage nightmares.

But I knew Mike. I knew what kind of person he was and what kind of business he did. I'd heard testimonials from others who had worked with him.

If he sent me a document and said "sign this," I trusted that he had a good reason.

When I did have a question I really wanted an answer to, I was comfortable reaching out, and he was great about getting me those answers.

I'm sure that he would have provided the same level of service had we been strangers off the street, but I didn't have to ask nearly as many questions or verify the answers to those questions because the trust was already there.

When you close on a house, you sign a lot of paperwork. Our attorney was Joe St. Rock, also from my BNI group.

Things in 2020 were a little different than any time before or after because of the quarantine. People were supposed to stay 6 feet apart. How do you stay six feet apart when signing documents?

The answer involves a 9 foot long, glass topped conference table.

My wife and I went into the conference room and sat at one end of the table. Peter Hoops, the partner in Joe's firm, came and sat at the other end of the table with all the documents.

He brought out a plastic folder with a weighted clip on the spine. This folder was properly balanced and stiffened so that if you flung it the right way, it would slide the length of the table to the other end.

And this is how we signed the documents for our closing.

Peter would take a document, put it in the folder and slide it down. He'd explain what it was and let us look at it. Amy and I would sign it, then we put it in the folder and slid it back.

Personally, I think all document signings should be done like this forever. It makes them far more dynamic.

I tried to rent the moving truck from my mechanic Charles, but he did not have any and the system routed me to someone else, thus another stranger in the process.

However, the moving team was all friends of mine, which was really cool because this was 7 months into the Covid-19 pandemic, so it was great to get to see people I know outside the four walls of the Zoom screen.

The purpose of this story is to illustrate just power powerful it can be to have a great network and how that network can help make some of the most challenging parts of life all that much easier.

Even if you don't know a huge network yourself yet, remember that your network is the aggregate of all the networks of all the people you know.

When you need someone, ask other people who have hired that service. Buying a house and don't know a Realtor? Ask your friends who own houses who their Realtor was. Be sure to ask if the experience was a good one and if they'd work with them again. People may not volunteer that they didn't like the person they worked with, not wanting to appear rude or negative or judgemental, but if you explicitly ask they are more likely to share.

Bonus #4

Business After Hours Events

The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly

This article was originally shared in my blog on January 5th, 2019

One of the mainstays of networking events from New York to Los Angeles is the Business After Hours event. Whether they call them “mixers”, “socials”, “After 5s” or any other creative name, the basic concept and format is the same.

Usually running weekday evenings from around 5:30 to around 7:30, the event is hosted at a local business who provides alcohol and food. Attendees mix, mingle, and network. There’s usually announcements and remarks from the host around the middle of the event, sometimes with a raffle. That’s the framework.

Most such events are run by chambers of commerce, business associations, young professional groups, and the like. There are some variations between events that can work just as well.

Some start a little earlier or run a little longer. Some have food spreads to rival a royal wedding, while others offer Bud Light and chips. Venues can range from accounting offices to ballrooms with a skyline view.

What makes a good Business After Hours?

Ultimately, as long as the event draws people, gives them a drink so they feel comfortable, and provides an environment in which they can talk, the event will be successful.

The goal of an individual going to a networking event is making quality connections. Thus, a good networking event is one where many people made good quality connections.

I have seen events with a couple dozen people that were great for everyone who was there, and I have seen events with almost 200 people that were a total waste of time.

The first thing you need for a good event is good people. This is highly subjective. Your perfect connection may not be of value to someone else. What is universal is that the people be friendly, outgoing, and open to networking. The wine helps with that.

An organizer can do a little to help things along. Many Chambers of Commerce have “ambassadors.” An ambassador’s job is to mingle at the event connect people. They talk to people and ask them whom they are looking to meet and try to connect them to the person in the room who is perfect for them.

Especially at larger events, it is entirely possible to be in the room with your perfect contact but never get to speak to them. This is where ambassadors are fantastic.

How to screw up a Business After Hours event

As simple as a Business After Hours event is, there are quite a few ways you can screw it up.

No Booze

A Business After Hours event must have drinks.

It doesn’t have to be fancy, but a Business After Hours Event needs drinks.

Americans like to have a drink when socializing. It’s not so much for intoxication as comfort. It is a signal that we are relaxing. No drink? Now it’s work. Who wants to work after 5?

You’ve probably never seen a Business After Hours without alcohol. That doesn’t mean that people don’t try to host them. It’s just that no one shows up. I was part of an organization that ran morning networking events and tried to run an after hours event with no booze, just like the morning event.

Besides the hosts and the organizers, one person showed up. One.

Whatever your opinion of alcohol, the fact is that people expect it at an evening event. It doesn't have to be a full bar. I've seen fine events where there was a self serve table with some bottles of Barefoot wine and some cans of Coors. But there has to be something.

Noisy Venue

Music at a Business After Hours can be a problem.

Music is great, but people go to networking events to network, and that requires talking.

The whole point of a networking event is to network. Networking requires talking. If you can't hear people, you can't talk, and you can't network. I don't care how beautiful and hip the venue is. I care if I can make a connection.

Sometimes the venue is fine, but the hosts decide to add their own noise with a band or a DJ. For the host, this event is an exhibition of their business, and they want to put on a great show. This may lead them to think like a wedding planner: looking for splashy fun ways to set themselves apart, and a band sure is unique.

A band can also make it impossible to talk. While some appropriate background music can create class and ambiance, too much volume is a disaster. I attended an event with a live band under a big tent outdoors. Fortunately it was outdoors because you could tell exactly where the speakers projected sound by where people were not standing. They were there to network, not to listen to music.

The result was an awkward event where no one stayed inside the tent with the food, only dashing in a nosh and dashing back out to talk.

Networking events should be fun, but it's not a party. It has a purpose, and if the fun interferes with the purpose, you have a bad event.

Too much interruption

People come to a Business After Hours event to network, not to listen to announcements.

Fundamentally, the payoff of a networking event is the one to one interaction. That is the value that attendees are attending to receive.

The hosts and the organizers want to make the most of the opportunity of having all these influential business people in one place, and that's why they have announcements in the first place. However, they've only got 5 minutes, 10 minutes max, to let people get back to what they came for.

The host can certainly speak for 3-4 minutes about their business, especially if they are sharing information that is interesting or that the audience doesn't know. Hosting in a 200 year old mansion, you might hold their attention a few more minutes. Got a car dealership and telling me about great deals on new models? 60 seconds and I'm on my way to the bar.

Hosts are generally pretty good about keeping it quick, mostly because the organizer is MCing and keeps them on track. The more common offender when it comes to verbosity? The organizers. Some feel the need to tell you about every upcoming event, every new program, a few old programs, etc.

If they are rattling off a rapid fire list of events and dates and times, I'm not going to remember them, and neither are you. They're on the web site. I can go find them.

There are some topics which do justify a little more length. Announcing new members is good because everyone likes to hear their name announced. Giving a few people a chance to share brief announcements of upcoming events is a great way to engage people.

Also, an interruption may be in order if there is some kind of activity which facilitates better networking. For example, one young professionals event I attended did a brief round of "speed networking. You got to talk to 10 people in 15 minutes, then afterwards you could seek out those that you wanted to connect

with more. Very efficient way to find the right people. Well worth the time.

Other types of events

Of course, a Business After Hours event is just one kind of networking event. Ultimately, anything that gives people the chance to meet and mingle can provide a networking value. There are formatted referral based meetings such as BNI. There are speed networking events and other structured events. Networking breakfasts and lunches, often involving a speaker or presentation are popular. Some groups organize volunteering opportunities and other forms of outreach as a way for their members to connect while working in the community.

There is no wrong way to create a networking event as long as it gives good people the opportunity to connect and build relationships in a positive environment.