

THE TRUE YOU

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Networking Basics

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You were born a natural networker, with the proper software build right in. How do we know? Because you're reading these lines, so chances are you've survived in society. And networking is an integral part of society. How did you get your first job? How do clients hear about you? How often have you emailed someone just to stay in touch? Without knowing it, you're networking from the morning till night.

Some people have bad associations with the very word of "networking"; we think of it as "working with a net": if anything happens to you, your network is there for you. It will help you deal with everything from typos to tornados. You're probably aware that referrals are 80% more effective than cold calls but did you know that 70% of all jobs are found through networking?

Networking is more than just who you know, it's a process you can master. Both MIT and the Harvard Business School recently added networking classes to their MBA programs.

If networking is so important, why isn't everybody doing it? One answer is the fear factor—namely, the fear of rejection. What if 'they' don't want to talk

to me? What if 'they' ignore me? What if they—gasp—*embarrass* me? It's true that approaching others puts your ego at risk. But isn't it also true that the biggest regrets you have come from the risks you didn't take? Waiting for people to find you and introduce themselves is pointless. Since many people are shy or afraid of rejection they just won't initiate contact; it's just as hard for them as it is for you. Do yourselves both a favor—go ahead and start! What's more, very few people are openly hostile or rude, if for no other reason than that it's bad for business.

Another problem is that many of us have been taught growing up not to talk to strangers, and to wait to be properly introduced before making contact. As adults, many of us are still waiting. What to do if you're not supposed to talk to strangers?

Redefine the term! Say you're attending an industry conference and there's not a soul you know. You're not really with strangers when you have so much in common with the other attendees.

"But isn't doing a good job enough?" Unfortunately not: we don't always get referrals just for doing an outstanding job. Often, they go to whomever is on the top of the referrer's mind. Multinational companies spend billions in advertising to achieve this "top-of-mind" awareness with you. With the right networking techniques, you can achieve the same result for much less.

So you know networking is

important, and you're ready to try. Where do you start? First, you need to know what your goals are: What do you want to accomplish? Now, what do you **really** want to accomplish? What would your life look like if you did? Be as specific as possible - you're giving your brain a roadmap to your ideal destination. What would your life look like if you got there?

Then, figure out what you need to do to reach these goals: Who are your targets? How many contacts do you need and in what area? Who are your competitors? What resources do you need, and where will you get them?

A good way to start is to create a diagram of your resources—your Network Diagram. Place yourself at the center of the page and map out the organizations and groups you belong to.

Include institutions you have attended, companies where you have worked and the contacts you have in each.

How big is your network?

Actually, it's the size of all your contacts, plus all your friends' contacts, your peers' contacts, etc. Where are most of your contacts located by city, state or country? By industry? Look at each main hub: if the company or organization is an important client, what would happen if your main contact left?

Whenever you start a new project, your diagram can shed light on new opportunities and help you implement your approach. What's more, once you see your network, you'll realize which actions you need to

take to optimize it by putting people in touch with each other.

You'll begin thinking about how some people's needs connect with other people's resources, just like a Rubik's Cube, until the pieces fall together.

Using the different categories found in most contact management software, you can divide your network in a variety of ways, for instance by geography or by industry. But whatever you do, your main division should be by *potential*:

- The **A** or “**hot**” **list** are your important contacts. Have you heard of the 80/20 rule? These are the 20% of your contacts who generate 80% of your results. What have you done for them lately?
- The **B list** contains your “active” contacts: These are the people with whom you are actively involved, either professionally or personally.
- The **C list** contains your “background” list: These are casual acquaintances, interesting people with whom you would like to stay in touch, yet are not immediately involved with.

Once you have your network organized, you can start using one of the most powerful tools of networking: maintenance. How do you maintain your network? Once a week, go through your contact list and call or email three people just to say hello. Once a month, carefully comb through your entire address book. Situations change, new opportunities arise, and ideas

will jump to your mind.

One of master networkers' secret weapons can be summarized in two words: write notes. The note should be handwritten, if possible in blue ink. Why blue?

Research indicates that blue elicits trust more than black does. You can designate a certain time in your schedule to write notes, or carry stamps and stationery with you. Then, whenever you're waiting anywhere, you can dash off a note and send it out.

But what should you write?

First and foremost, thank you notes. It's always the season to give thanks: after meeting someone, you can thank them for taking time to meet you. You can also thank people for good advice they gave, for interesting information, or for a phone meeting, especially if you spoke with someone for the first time or if you spoke for a long time. You can thank your current clients for their business on the anniversary of your engagement.

You can send a wide variety of cards, from birthday notes to holiday greetings: as long as you personalize them, they can really make a difference. The reference to a golf handicap or sailboat renovation will make your card stand out from the dozens of printed cards landing on the desk. There are other days that allow you to give the personal touch, such as writing Irish clients for St. Patrick's Day or French friends on the occasion of Bastille Day.

Clippings from newspapers or magazines can earn you major points: when you see an article that relates to someone's business, industry, or personal projects, send it along with a short “thought-you'd-enjoy” note.

When someone you know is in the paper, send a copy of the article with a congratulatory note. Are you thinking that surely, they've received a lot of praise already? Actually, most people mean well, but tend to forget to pass along those words of praise or encouragement

Last but not least, don't forget the comic strips! When a particular comic makes you think of someone you know, cut it out and send it. If you're lucky, they'll find them up in their office and they'll think of you every time they see it. Talk about “top of mind awareness”!