

Introduction

Everyone has heard the expression, “It’s not what you know. It’s who you know.” It is probably one of our greatest business adages. But equally important, *it’s what you know about* who you know. These aphorisms are the most revealing of truths.

Of course, what you know is vitally important, because in today’s competitive world people want to deal primarily with smart professionals who are very good at what they do. But when there’s such a big pool of talented people to choose from, there must be another level of distinction.

What, then, differentiates you from the rest of the group? Stop here and think for a moment. You’re an accountant, you’re a lawyer, you’re a salesman, you’re a manager in a large corporation, or you’re running a small business. You’re in a fungible world. So how can you stand out from the pack? What makes you different or, better yet, special? If you don’t have an answer, or you’re searching for an answer, my intent is to help you find it. Or create it.

At the end of the day, you want as many connectors as possible. Referrals come from friends, relatives, or colleagues who know someone you don’t—and can connect you to him or her.

In John Guare’s well-known play, *Six Degrees of Separation*, everyone is only six times removed in circumstance or acquaintance from every other person on the planet. Mind blowing? Absolutely. Especially once you get a handle on how it works.

I believe that your next sale, your next deal, your *ultimate success*, is just one phone call away—or one degree of separation. The power of who you know, and what you know about who you know, is immeasurable and creates huge opportunities. Networking is a recognizable, quantifiable thing.

I'd like to make one thing clear right away. It's my feeling that networking has been a victim of bad public relations. Somehow, networking has been equated with hustling or overt solicitation. In the past, there was nothing subtle about a networker. His methodology began with the cocktail party pronouncement: "Excuse me, I've got to work the room." A person who is "selling" was often considered by more reserved people as somewhat vulgar and in some echelons as a user, a freeloader, or an unsavory person.

Be certain of this: There's nothing negative about being a good networker. To some degree, I believe it's a hackneyed term. There is a difference between arrogance and confidence, but it's a subtle one and straddles a very fine line. Being bold and straightforward doesn't have to be equated with being smug and conceited. You can sound knowledgeable without being pompous. You can forge valuable business bonds without feeling like you're constantly trying to "use" somebody. Part of this attitude comes from modulating your mind-set.

On its deepest level, networking isn't about using people. It's about giving something of yourself. Contrary to the thinking of "what's in it for me?"

Many people in the business world believe that networking is simply intrinsic to a certain type of personality. You're either good at it or not so good at it, and that's all there is to it. I've got good news: Networking isn't genetic. Just because it wasn't ordained at birth, it doesn't mean you can't acquire it.

You may be skeptical. I understand that and anticipated it before writing this book. But every day the world of commerce expands and becomes more relationship based. Every day, someone in power makes an important hiring or buying decision based on the simple fact that he or she “knows” the person, or knows someone else who can attest to a person’s ability and character, and not just that the person in question can do the job.

If you’re the type of person who sits on his hands and waits for business to walk through your door, you’re making a huge mistake. When business is good, you probably never have to pick up the phone. When it’s pouring outside, you likely don’t think about rainmaking.

It’s not enough to say, “I guess I better get up from behind my desk and pound the pavement a bit.” If you don’t develop an extensive list of clients and potential customers, you may be headed for an unexpected slump, or worse. If you don’t take a more serious look at networking, you’re not only missing deals and sales that you’re not even aware of but you may also be putting your business or career in serious jeopardy.

I don’t mean to sound intimidating. The ideas in this book are simple, simple, simple! There’s no special alchemy involved. Perhaps, surprisingly, they are rooted in common sense and simple techniques that anyone can learn to apply.

Networking is arguably an art or a science, or perhaps even a combination of both. But it is not a difficult science, nor is it an opaque art. It is not without form or structure. Understand a vital point: Networking is not a theory. It is an actual practice. It’s not specifically taught at Harvard Business School (though getting a degree from a place like that certainly opens doors—something that every applicant and graduate already knows and relies on). Perhaps it should be, so we can remove any trace of denigration from its meaning. (There are still some private clubs

that forbid members from taking out note pads in the dining room. How presumptuous to think the members actually may be doing business over lunch!)

Some people are naturals, people born to network. But it's my contention that it is simply an acquired skill, just like any other. You can become an excellent networker if you are disciplined, open minded, willing to share, and willing to make the necessary effort to learn how to do it.

Most business people don't realize the value of their acquaintances and the relationships they have. There are more than five thousand people in my personal database. Obviously, I don't know all of them well, but I have enough information about most of the people so that at some point I could call on them. More important, if any one of them calls on me, I am in a position to recall the necessary data and help them. Every day I add new friends and acquaintances; in the past two decades I have become the go-to guy for many of my relationships. My colleagues often tell me that they've passed on a referral by saying, "Call Jeff Meshel; he knows everyone." It's a flattering comment. You can be that kind of person. I want you to be conscious of who you know, and I want you to maximize the benefit of every relationship. Networking is much more than meeting someone and exchanging business cards. As you'll read, it's what you do *after* you make the initial contact that matters.

Most people need help understanding how to network. Becoming sensitive to the needs of others is paramount for success. Networking is a discipline that can and should start before one even begins a business career. The first hurdle in networking is to realize that it is one of the most vital skills you can have in your repertoire—that it's something learnable, and stands you in better stead for success. It's just a tool but an extremely valuable one.

In the course of this book I will return to three major themes: the power of developing relationships, how to sell yourself, and how to always do the right thing. I believe each of these themes to be essential to increasing your networking abilities and business capabilities, which are so reliant upon each other as to be indiscernible.

I recently had lunch with a very dear friend, Peter, who is a stockbroker at one of the large New York City firms and like all private-wealth guys wants to build his client base. He isn't doing badly, but it isn't like the glory days of pre-Internet meltdown. He is fortunate in that he is very personable and has the appropriate skills to really excel. Yet he is not a guy who immediately warms to the expression "it's who you know," though he's in precisely the business where it matters most.

I tried to convince him about the power of networking and getting involved in additional platforms. I explained how every contact he has is a potential resource. I told him to try to help people and good things will happen in return. He picked uncomfortably at his Caesar salad. He wanted to agree with me, but he couldn't. *He doesn't get it.*

I continued to prod him. I discovered that Peter plays recreational softball. He lives in a very affluent neighborhood. I asked him if he knows what his teammates do for a living. He proudly answered, "No, I don't want to mix sports with business. All of these guys are there to play ball. It's an escape from the daily grind. The last thing they want to talk about is their work."

I sensed that he feared that he was crossing the line and might be perceived improperly. I tried to explain that he doesn't have to sell his services. If he knew what his teammates did for a living, he could potentially make referrals and help his teammates. Do things for others and these good deeds will come back. His

response was that he feels funny about being “pushy.” It is not about hard selling, or even soft selling. It’s not about asking people directly for favors. It’s not about doing business in the on-deck circle. It’s about building relationships and trust. It’s about making yourself approachable.

By dessert, I had become somewhat agitated about not getting through to him. “Peter, if you asked one of your teammates what they do and then said, ‘I know someone who may be synergistic to your business,’ do you think he wouldn’t be interested? You’re not selling to him. You are trying to help him.

“I have never met anyone who doesn’t want to meet someone else who could be a good business contact. Your teammates will appreciate your efforts, I promise. They may ultimately do business with you or refer someone to you because you went out of your way for them.”

Peter’s story can be prophetic in a negative way, if you allow it to be. If you don’t ask, you don’t receive.

Have you ever had a friend suggest to you that you weren’t exploring enough potential business opportunities through friends, relatives, and people you just met? Were you somewhat reserved when you heard this kind of criticism? Or did you nod your head in agreement and then fail to act in a positive way? Have you ever found yourself reacting to advice the way my friend Peter did?

If you’ve answered yes to any of these questions, then you’re putting yourself at a serious disadvantage in your career and business. The next time you’re at a business function try to categorize the various guests whom you don’t know at all. Is there a person in a group who is controlling a conversation where three or four others are hanging on their every word? Is there a person off in a corner, nursing a glass of wine without attempting to meet anyone? Which person would you rather be?

I admit that Peter had me frustrated. He listened, he under-

stood, but he won't act. At the end of the day, we all have to help ourselves. I don't expect you to do everything I do, but I know you will relate to some of my experiences and beliefs. If you follow some of my suggestions I guarantee you great results.

The world continually faces very challenging times. Recently, oil has been as high as \$65 a barrel. U.S. currency, valued against the euro, is hitting all-time lows. Alan Greenspan, in describing Fed policies, said, "There are bubbles all over, and we are going to deal with them." Though the nation's vital signs are fairly positive, there is a considerable amount of coughing and sputtering, despite a stock market rally in 2005. The economy is taking one step forward, one step backward. Analysts and economists are sometimes bitterly divided on whether U.S. business results are sporadic and fleeting or really indicate a long-term move forward. Interest rates are near fifty-year lows but are slowly moving north. Major companies have filed for bankruptcy protection, white-collar criminals are still in the news almost daily, pension funds are substantially underfunded, and foreclosures are at all-time highs. There is still a certain amount of nervousness in the air surrounding any good economic news. And all bets are off if there's another cataclysmic event due to terrorist activity.

Let's say, for example, you're a small business owner and you've just discovered the potential to sell your products internationally. Perhaps you already have a few contacts in Europe. But what about China? The largest nation on earth is now wide open for commerce, and many business analysts expect it to be a major U.S. trading partner in the coming years. There may be great opportunities there. You'd like to pick up the phone and make a call, but I'll bet you don't know a single soul in Beijing.

What can you do to create more opportunities for yourself? My answer is to expand the list of *who* you know.

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I'd like you to take the following test:

Take a quick scan of the following list of names. Maybe you can circle familiar names as you go. You'll see they are common surnames. Some you will recognize, others you won't.

Algazi, Alvarez, Alpern, Ametrano, Andrews, Aran, Arnstein, Ashford, Bailey, Ballout, Bamberger, Baptista, Barr, Barrows, Baskerville, Bassiri, Bell, Bokgese, Brandao, Bravo, Brooke, Brightman, Billy, Blau, Bohlen, Bohn, Borsuk, Brendle, Butler, Calle, Cantwell, Carrell, Chinlund, Cirker, Cohen, Collas, Couch, Callegher, Calcaterra, Cook, Crowley, Curbelo, Dellamana, Diaz, Dirar, Duncan, D'Agostino, Delakas, Dillon, Donaghey, Daly, Dawson, Edery, Ellis, Elliott, Eastman, Easton, Famous, Fermin, Fialco, Finklestein, Farber, Falkin, Feinman, Friedman, Gardner, Gelpi, Glascock, Grandfield, Greenbaum, Greenwood, Gruber, Garil, Goff, Gladwell, Greenup, Gannon, Granshaw, Garcia, Gennis, Gerard, Gericke, Gilbert, Glassman, Glazer, Gomendio, Gonzalez, Greenstein, Guglielmo, Gurman, Haberkorn, Hoskins, Hussein, Hamm, Hardwick, Harrell, Hauptman, Hawkins, Henderson, Hayman, Hibara, Hehmann, Herbst, Hedges, Hogan, Hoffman, Horowitz, Hsu, Huber, Ikiz, Jaroschy, Johann, Jacobs, Jara, Johnson, Kassel, Keegan, Kuroda, Kavanau, Keller, Kevill, Kiew, Kimbrough, Ramos, Regan, Reisman, Renkert, Roberts, Rowan, Rene, Rosario, Rothbart, Saperstein, Schoenbrod, Schwed, Sears, Statosky, Stutphen, Sheehy, Silverton, Silverman, Silverstein, Sklar, Slotkin, Speros, Stollman, Sadowski, Schles, Shapiro, Sigdel, Snow, Spencer, Steinkol, Stewart, Stires, Stopnik, Stonehill, Tayss, Tilney, Temple, Torfield, Townsend, Trimpin, Turchin, Villa, Vasillov, Voda, Waring, Weber, Weinstein, Wang, Wegimont, Weed, Weishaus.

This list of 250 surnames was taken from the Manhattan phone book. Now, identify the names of people you know with the same last names. Now, add up who you know, your "networking quotient." For example, if you know three people whose

last name is Cohen, you get three points; two people whose last name is Wang, you get two points; and so on. For every additional name you know you get one point.

According to Malcolm Gladwell, author of *The Tipping Point*, people with a special gift for bringing people together are “connectors.” Connectors tend to know a lot of people. Gladwell gave a similar test to about four hundred people. The results varied. A group of students in their late teens or early twenties knew about twenty-one people on the average. A group of health educators and academics in their forties and fifties, largely white, highly educated, and wealthy, had an average score of thirty-nine.

The difference in the scores wasn’t surprising. College students don’t have as wide a circle of contacts as people in their forties. In every group tested, there was a wide range between the highest and the lowest scorers. In Gladwell’s sample, the low score was nine and the high score was 118.

What is your score? If you are unpleasantly surprised, you probably should make a greater effort to expand who you know.

I am a connector, but it also means I am a collector. Every person I meet goes into my database. My sensors are always tuned in to whatever environment I’m in. I thrive on putting people together. When something good happens from an introduction, it makes my day. I create a lot of opportunities—both business and social—for a great number of people, and at the end of the day so many good things come back to me.

My philosophy isn’t for everyone. It isn’t a quick fix, where after six weeks you’re transformed from a totally introverted person into an outgoing, accomplished networker. If you think only about yourself, the likelihood that people will think of you is greatly diminished. Most people are *me* oriented and won’t immediately think they can be a good networker. If you’re too egocentric, too self-centered, and cannot fathom the notion of

trying to change some of your daily habits, none of my recommendations will take hold.

I have given a lot of thought about how to convey to others what I know about networking. I am living proof of the power you can gain by building and nurturing new relationships. I am only one phone call away from reaching someone I need. I realized that it isn't a matter of following perfunctory rules. A great networker has to be outgoing and a giver. The best are good salesmen, too. Selling a product or a service or yourself all have common traits and skills. I discuss "selling" in a general way at the beginning of this book. It relates directly to improving your ability to meet new business contacts, form networks, and increase the results in your chosen career.

It is my hope that the following pages will make you more knowledgeable and more effective. *I hope to show you how networking can enrich your career, your business, and your everyday relationships. After reading this book, I want you to be conscious of who you know and how to maximize the potential of every new person you meet.*