

Network or Perish

BY ROBYN HENDERSON



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

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

Whether it's a job opportunity, the name of a good doctor or motor mechanic, people want to do business with people they know like and trust. If they don't know someone in a specific area, based on the trust they have for another person, they will often accept their recommendation.

Smart leaders and networkers today surround themselves with people who are better than them in certain areas. They are willing to acknowledge it and pay for that experience if necessary. Bill Gates says, "For me, a big part of the fun has always been to hire and work with smart people. I enjoy learning from them."

Author Harvey Mackay believes "it's not who you know, but who knows what you know." One of the challenges we face in Australia is that people are not encouraged to self promote. They often face ridicule and criticism for being pushy. We often

refer to it as the "tall poppy syndrome." Many people are reluctant to stand out from the crowd or try to be noticed.

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

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Tall Poppies Alternative

If you are wanting to increase your visibility within your organization or profession, you don't need to be pushy, or monopolise conversations. It helps though if you talk people "up" rather than gossiping in a destructive manner. One of the universal laws well known to networkers is the law of reciprocity – what you give out comes back tenfold. So if you gossip about someone today, it may be your turn tomorrow.

Why not try a gossip free day every week. Look for positive ways of discussing people within your network. If you don't know a lot about the people you are working with, practise your listening skills, ask open ended questions (starting with who, what, how, when, where or why). Most importantly, unless it is culturally unacceptable, make eye contact with the person you are speaking to. Listen with your heart as well as your ears. This means having a focussed conversation and remaining in the present moment, not distracted by past or future events.

Avoid Elevator Talk

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

Broaden Your Networks

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

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

Become a Sphere Of Influence

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

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