RGT



THE LITTLE BOOK OF

BUILDING BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS

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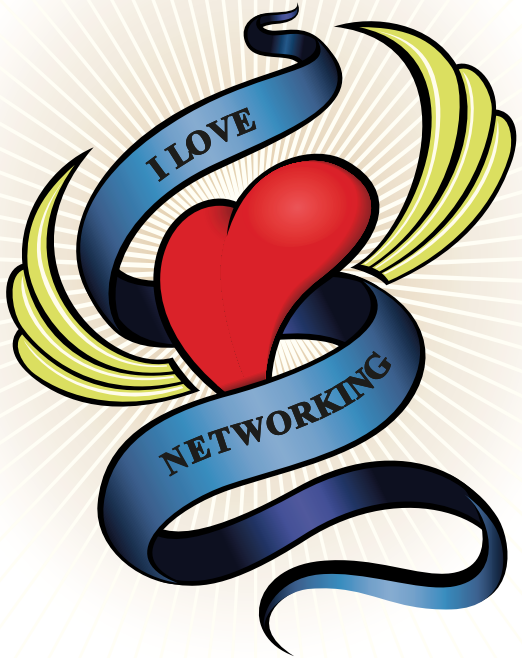
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Very few of us enjoy networking and yet it is as important today at it's always been. Lloyd's of London is so named because the merchants, captains, sailors and underwriters would gather in Lloyd's Coffee House in 1686 to chat about sea-related stuff over what was then the new, fashionable drink. Nothing's changed!

Ask most people how they feel about networking, and they'll grimace slightly: "Um, I'm not really keen but you sort of have to do it don't you."

Well, you sort of do, so if you might as well be sort of half decent at it.

First things first: establishing and building relationships, whether that be at an event or with colleagues within your organisation will move through – assuming you wish them to – the following levels:



- **Acknowledgement**
  We don't need to have met. I notice you on LinkedIn or your organisation's website.
- **Understanding**
  I gain an understanding of the services you provide & skills you have.
- **Acceptance**
  I accept you have skills I could possibly have need of.
- **Respect**
  You have earned my respect by helping me.
- **Trust**
  We have established & nurtured a working relationship.
- **Bond**
  We have worked together over months/years. We continue to do business with each other, even If you move to another organisation.

Developing through these stages is a process NOT an event. Some relationships will move quickly up the pyramid, others may take many years.

Stop putting so much pressure on yourself when you're networking. Sure, you're representing your organisation and of course you want to let people know what you do, how fab the firm is and what you could do to help the people you get chatting to.

But when you are so focused on what you're going to say and when you're going to trot out that lovely elevator pitch you've rehearsed, you're not listening to what the person in front of you is saying: and that's not nice.

What's more, it's of bugger all use if you are hoping to build a relationship with them. Relax. Indulge in a bit of small talk. If the opportunity arises to talk about business, you can tell them what you do but if it doesn't, no matter.

Networking is simply one small element of developing business: not the whole shooting match.

If you are like most of us who are dead busy all the time, you simply cannot afford to mess about attending general networking events, at which you may possibly, perhaps, meet someone who's going to be your next mega client.

Decide what sectors you want to make contacts in, make a list of the firms within it with which you think you should be talking, find out who is responsible for purchasing what you sell, discover if there is a networking forum/committee/association/ trade body, at which these people meet – a conference, annual exhibition etc and then go to it (even better, find out how you get to speak at it!)

Some networking events you attend because you must be seen there and the organisation you represent needs someone to 'wave the flag'.

Ones that you attend because you want to win business need to be crammed full of the people you want to sell to. If they aren't, don't go – you'll only meet an IFA, a yoga teacher and a life coach!



A water cooler moment

A bit on internal networking

'Internal clients and stake holders.' These people were formerly known as 'colleagues and friends!' It's no wonder increasingly large numbers of people feel detached from what's going on outside their own team in the wider organisation.

It's amazing how many firms talk about 'developing a cross-selling culture' but are crammed full of individuals sitting feet apart emailing one another!

The secret to internal networking is a simple one – talk to people in the office.

That's right: get up off your backside and go and speak to them rather than emailing.

For goodness' sake, do not waste one of your days in the office, seated in front of your computer. Make the most of those and take the opportunity to meet colleagues, especially in other teams and departments.





I've delivered training to loads of people from all over the place and the thing that strikes me is just how similar we all are! In other words, the French, Germans, Greeks, and Latvians are as keen on chit chat and small talk as us Brits. I've noticed some slight differences: We like to talk about the weather and travel, whereas I've been told that those in Warsaw like to moan about which streets the council have closed that day. Likewise, the Danes are happy to talk politics and the Muscovites about what was on the telly last night.

I'm no expert on such matters and if you are spending a lot of time with people from different cultures you should get training from a specialist or read one of the many great books there out there.

All I'll say is that you should be aware of what's suitable as a topic of small talk in a particular country prior to your visit or before networking in the UK with those from overseas.

Oh, and us Northern Europeans don't tend to do as much touching as those in Mediterranean countries. For example – 2 British blokes won't touch each other once during a 20-minute conversation, whereas 2 Italians will touch around 140 times!



Groups – I avoid them if I can: too tricky attempting to break into a group of people who are deep in discussion. If you must, approach the group so that you are facing the person that's speaking. Make eye contact with them and smile, so that they can acknowledge your presence.

Groups of 2 or 3 – miles easier than a larger group. Very often two people standing will be at 60 degrees to one another (the "open 2'), thus subconsciously leaving a 'gap' for a third person to fill. Look out for these spaces and if you see one, approach whilst catching the eye of the speaker and ask if they mind if you join them: they won't say "No!" Person on their own – How did you feel when someone came up to you and started chatting: relieved, grateful, indebted to them for the rest of your life? Yeah, we've all been there. People alone are the easiest to talk to.

"Do you want coffee?" A great little icebreaker: when you are helping yourself to coffee* at the refreshment table, 9 times out of 10, another delegate will approach, waiting to get themselves a drink. Once you've poured your coffee, offer it to them. Or, if you've just helped yourself to a splash of milk, ask them if they'd like milk and pour until, "when". It works with any liquid (preferably drinkable).



"It's been lovely to chat to you this evening Sarah but there are a few people I really must catch up with, so, if you'll excuse me, I'll just go and do that."

Simple, to the point and above all, honest. Telling Sarah that you are off to freshen up your drink or popping to the loo, leaves open the possibility that she does the same, which can be a tad awkward in the case of the former and downright peculiar in the case of the latter. And even if she doesn't, are you seriously suggesting that once you've attended to either of those 'errands' that you are leaving the right impression by sneaking back into the room and not formally bidding farewell to her?



Suited connectors

People who excel at networking are superb at the next step: connecting. They have an ability to connect people they know, together, leaving them free to move on to another conversation partner.

Should you find yourself alone at an event and knowing not a soul, then when you do get chatting to someone, for heavens' sake ask them if they know anybody else and whether – once you have finished chatting – if they could introduce you to them.

If, on the other hand you are hosting an event or merely attending one at which you know loads of people, then act as you would if you were hosting a get together in your own home and pair people up whom you think will gel.



"I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name?"

Lots of people reckon they cannot remember names, which is a big fat lie. They can, it's just that they don't hear the person's name when they are first introduced.

When 2 people meet for the first time there is a lot of 'visual noise' going on. When you approach someone, you are checking out their body language, what they are wearing, who's with them or around them but you're also concerned about what you are going to say, whether your handshake will be OK and whether you'll make a good impression.

When the person you greet says their name, it gets 'lost' in all that's going on and you simply do not hear it.

Now that you know that, whenever you meet someone for the first time you are going to repeat their name immediately and repeat it again maybe 3 or 4 times during the first minute.

When they say: "Hi, my name is Shivani" you will say "Very pleased to meet you, Shivani." And then maybe 30 seconds in, ask; "So, how did you get here this evening Shivani or who is it you work?

for Shivani?"

If you forget, you can always ask them to repeat it. However, you can only do this once!

Of course, if it's an event where everyone's wearing name badges then you can always steal a glance at those.



1. Eye to Body
Pilots wear pilots' uniforms for a reason: to communicate their experience and authority. We make assessments of people based on what they are wearing. Make sure you are dressed appropriately!

2. Eye to Eye

3. Hand to Hand
Touching is fundamentally important to human relationships and what and how you touch varies across cultures.

In the UK and most of the 'Western' business-world, the handshake is the accepted form of touching when meeting someone for the first time. 'Dry' and 'Firm' are what we are going for in a decent handshake, so go and wash your hands before attending a meeting or event! Touching causes oxytocin, the bonding neurotransmitter to be released into our brains and has the added benefit of making us relax. Understanding its importance will make sure you get all your relationships off to a cracking start.



Doing it virtually

It is impossible to 'perform' those first 3 stages virtually! Which is why, whilst TEAMS and ZOOM are useful in maintaining existing relationships, they are woeful at establishing them because there is far too much information missing.

One of the big factors keeping us engaged in a conversation is judging the emotional response of the person in front of us to what we are discussing. This is much harder to do virtually because there is a lack of sensory feedback – visually (eye contact, micro-gestures, proprioception) and audibly (those barely audible sounds we make to indicate we are interested, agreeing, or disagreeing).

It is the absence of these plus other factors, which mean we are less committed to an on-screen relationship and why people are far more ready to mute their mic and turn off their camera, particularly in encounters involving more than a couple of people.

When virtual is the only option you MUST make sure to listen intently, not only to what they are saying but HOW – become aware of what words and phrase they use and be sure to repeat them.

Look directly into the camera! Yes, you will miss out on observing their facial expression but more importantly, they will sense you have made them the focus of your attention and, when they speak, you are really listening!



Kissing

What a minefield this is and far too much to discuss for a tiny little book like this but here are a few pointers. And I'm keeping it simple here and assuming we are talking about boy/girl kissing rather than same gender. This is a point that blokes worry about and since I am one, I'm writing from the chaps' perspective.

If in doubt: don't bother, simply shake hands (unless it's your missus).

If the woman in question is a good client or colleague with whom you have a good working relationship, then I reckon it's fine.



Self-Disclosure

The weather, travel, what you are doing or did on holiday/at the weekend: these are the standard topics of small talk in the UK.

Small talk relaxes you and the person you have just met. Small talk is where you find common ground. Small talk allows you to gain an insight into what the person is like. It allows you to build rapport, it shows that you are more than simply your title and organisation printed on your badge. Furthermore, it's what you reveal in small talk that they will remember long after you part company.

Sometimes you'll find yourself indulging in loads of chit chat and business may never come up: fine. On occasion, the time you spend will be shorter and you'll get on to the business stuff nice and quick: fine.

People do business with people they like. They also prefer to work with those they like. You may well be a technical wizard in your chosen field but heed the words of Franklin D Johnson "Delivering a lecture on economics is a bit like pissing down your own leg: it might seem hot to you but isn't to anybody else."



In many cases there are nibbles laid on, which is great in one respect because if you pay a couple of visits to the buffet and load up, it'll mean not having to dive into Tesco Metro to get your tea on the way home.

On the other hand, it can make mixing and mingling a potential minefield.

So, first remember that everyone will be in the same boat and second of all, if you do get chatting with someone, simply put your plate down, wipe your mouth of the coleslaw and converse as normal

2 EARS + 1 MOUTH



Face it: we are each assaulted with people trying to get our attention every moment of the day – text, work and personal email, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Insta, TikTok, phones, voicemail, electronic advertising hoardings, free newspapers, let alone 600 channels of TV! It's therefore all too tempting to switch off or at best, only half-listen when you are networking. Well don't! We hear with our ears, but we listen with our eyes! Souse them. You hate it when you're talking to someone, and they keep looking over your shoulder, so don't do it to them. Listening: I mean, really listening, is hard work, which is another reason to attend only networking events that will be crammed full of people you really want to listen to!



Treat the people you invite to a do you've got organised as you would guests in your home.

When they arrive, greet them personally but before that, give some thought to which members of your team you will introduce them to, as well as people in other departments that perhaps they have, as yet no contact with (this is how you begin cross-selling).

Ask yourself whether there are any other clients with whom they might get on or be interested to meet.

In other words, take control of your event and put some effort in to planning it. You should never have guests standing alone or in a little huddle of people just from their organisation.

Equally, make sure your people don't hang about in packs: it's intimidating and off-putting for your guests.



Phone, phone, write, email, email, NEXT!

There is absolutely no point attending or organising networking events if you are not going to follow up afterwards. That does not mean you'll want to organise a coffee or set up a lunch with everyone – although you should thank everyone for coming along – but with those that you reckon there might be an opportunity for business in the near or distant future, moving things along is imperative.

Details of how to do just that are in another booklet and for another course; 'The Little Book of Business Development'.

However, for now, remember to set up the next chat over tea or coffee whilst still at the event and talking to them. Tell them what you are going to do and when and then do it.

This booklet is designed to be a handy little reminder of the main aspects of stuff covered during the networking skills course, which is why I dish them out at the end. And whilst it's as small, portable and easy to handle as a cute little puppy, it's not designed to be the only thing you ever read as part of improving your 'getting on with people', skills. On the other hand it will be happy stored in your desk drawer, whereas puppies won't.

There are loads of books together with a deluge of stuff on the internet that'll help you gain confidence in networking. Seek them out but above all, remember, most people feel a bit shy networking and you already know how to get along with virtually everyone you meet!

Enjoy



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REALLY GREAT TRAINING

This booklet is small, portable and as easy to handle as a puppy.

It's not designed to be the only thing you ever read as part of improving your 'getting on with people' skills but unlike a baby dog, will snuggle happily in your desk drawer ready for when you next need to stroke it.

There are loads of books together with a deluge of stuff on the internet that'll help you gain confidence in building business relationships. Seek them out and above all, remember, most people feel a bit shy networking and you already know how to get along with virtually everyone you meet!

There are many ways to keep in touch with me but here are the ones people seem to like best:

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