

Members Quarterly

Fall 2015 Edition

Ask the Expert

Your Net Worth is Your Network

Make it work for you now

Q: What is the value of keeping an active network while you are working?

A: Let me begin by sharing my own story.
It was Friday afternoon and I was meeting with HR to end my employment with a company I had been with for eight years. It was bright and sunny outside as I signed the papers, handed over my keys, passes and devices.

After a few days of decadent lounging about and reading just for fun, (something I had not done for years), it was time to start thinking about my career. A number of former colleagues had gone out on their own and after talking to a few of them, it seemed evident that I should do the same.

I had more than enough skills from which I knew clients would benefit. The only problem was that I had no clients. I realized that over the last eight years, I spent my time getting to know people inside the company and hadn't spent any time nurturing contacts on the outside. I had the skills, experience, equipment and business name, but no clients or networks.

So I joined a number of business 'networking' organizations which kept my mornings, lunches and evenings busy. I met people from all sectors of industry, government and not for profit. I gave out hundreds of business cards, told my story and gave my pitch over and over again. Very quickly, the thought of networking made my mouth dry and gave me a cramp in the pit of my stomach. Not only did it become the one activity I dreaded but it also brought me little business. What was going wrong?

I thought about the times in my life when I had been successful. I saw that it was when I had been helped by other people. I realized in my burst of 'networking', I had been so busy selling that I was forgetting to connect with people, to learn about them and their goals. I saw that I spoke more than I listened and that I asked very few questions. I realized that the problem was my focus. It had become all about how others could help me. Then I decided to change my approach. I asked myself what successful people do. They help those around them be successful too. They give before they take.

After reading a number of success stories, I realized that no one has become successful without the help of others. I began to network differently. By focusing on others, I strived to help everyone in my network to get connected with people who would help them. I got excited about meeting new people, hearing about their businesses and their aspirations. I became a connectivity hub.

This approach took negative pressure off me and actually energized me. I am building a business through my network, one connection at a time. I am fascinated by almost everyone I meet. There are amazing stories out there and yours is one of them. We are crafting the next chapter in



Wayne Rawcliffe
MBA, Founder &
President,
Senga Consulting Inc.

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each other's' stories.

The happy ending to this story is that today I have thousands of people in my network. People I can call as subject matter experts, people who know other people with whom I can connect, people that I can discuss new business ideas and hear their valuable feedback and suggestions. The worth of your network is so much more than the actual purchase price someone will pay for a product. Your network keeps you connected to the everyday pulse of business – all there waiting for you to tap into.

Other ways of growing your network include teaching and board leadership. I have been on boards with directors of companies whom I can now phone and meet for coffee. I have a relationship and shared experience outside of business that gives me permission to connect.

Networking is very much like dating (without all the complications). When you are dating, you take the time and energy to think about what would make the other person feel special. You think about their interests and tastes. You consider what you are doing and how you are doing it. You are fascinated with the other person's interests, loves, abilities, talents, experiences, fears and peculiarities. Be present, be curious and listen deeply to the needs of others and then identify who in your network can meet some of the expressed and non-expressed needs.

Always be positive. That does not mean being up and happy all the time. It means never saying anything about others that you would not want posted on Facebook.

Finally, eat like the Chinese. A number of years ago, I went with a friend to Hong Kong. The Chinese do not think about family like westerners. I consider my family to be my brother, my mother and my father. His family has almost 100 people. Over the next two weeks, I met the family at breakfast, early lunch, lunch, late lunch, dinner, late dinner or even later dinner. Connections are made over food. Food is the epicentre of Chinese connections.

We can learn a lot from the Chinese. You cannot rush food. Food invites stories. It requires time. It requires a relationship. It always has. Your net worth is your network. Take time. Listen. Be fascinated. Be open. Be curious. Most of all, enjoy people.

Wayne Rawcliffe is President of Senga Consulting. Contact him directly at wayne@senga.ca.