

'Next'working...What are you doing to help your networking career?

By Robert Sicora, Sicora Consulting, Inc.

There are all sorts of networking software out there right now, Facebook, LinkedIn, the list goes on, but does anything replace getting out and truly meeting people and developing relationships?

When you do meet someone, you have 30 seconds or less to make that first impression. Do you use it as an opportunity for them to make an impression on you as well?

Does that impression include having a clear understanding of their styles and preferences, something that will allow you to have three to four times greater success in connecting and sustaining with them? Allowing you to move on to the 'next' best thing, to 'next'work with them...

I encourage you to read the following article by Wallace Immen regarding a networking specialist by the name Tim Cork, and learn more about interpersonal networking, then at the end, we will provide you an opportunity to learn more about how to develop the critical skill of recognizing types in others of their styles and preferences.

Rules to win the networking game

By Wallace Immen

When you meet Tim Cork, he's more than likely to whip out a pen and scribble notes about you as you talk. He'll probably be bold enough to ask for an introduction to two of your friends as well.

While that may seem more than a tad pushy, even invasive, it's all part of the smart networking game, Mr. Cork says. And networking is his daily business.

The president of the Toronto career transition company Nexcareer, Inc. says that you have to be very deliberate about expanding and updating your network. The payoff will come in great sources of contacts, advice and ideas for expanding your career.

He's a big believer in the theory of six degrees of separation -- the notion that we are all connected through a chain of no more than six people. Except, from 20 years of networking, Mr. Cork says he is convinced "in Canada, there's really only one degree or, at most, two degrees of separation."

But most people aren't methodical enough to benefit from the real power of networking, and they give up entirely too easily when they put it into practice, he says.

While you don't have to go to his extremes, he says anyone can easily make the right connections.

Practice networking every day. Everyone has a social system that can be the source of important contacts. Don't narrow your network to the people you know in your work or business social

engagements, Mr. Cork advises. Your doctor, dentist, accountant lawyer, real estate agent and others you come into contact with are sure to have their own broad networks as well.

Choose your targets. "If you want to fly with eagles, you have to hang out with eagles and learn how they do it," Mr. Cork says.

Focus your networking efforts on people who are going to be most influential in getting what you want. If you want a better job or advancement, the eagles are those who have already achieved the lofty heights you aspire to. You can tap them for advice about their experience and the challenges and tribulations they experienced on the way up.

Approach even the loftiest eagles. Most are more approachable than you might imagine, Mr. Cork says. The best way to catch their attention: Get them talking about themselves. "Think of an imaginary sign around their neck that reads: 'Make me feel important; make me feel good.' "

You can do that by boning up on your targets. Do a little research to find out about a recent achievement to ask about. Most people consider that a compliment.

"Let them know you admire their expertise and would like their advice on the subject, or help in finding someone who can help you."

If someone says no, just say thanks and move on, Mr. Cork recommends. "There are more eagles out there who will be willing to spend some time to help you learn to fly," he says."

Tap into the senses. People meeting you for the first time form an instant impression of you before you ever start into your message.

Visual clues, such as the way you dress, the way you stand and your obvious facial cues that show you are interested in them can predispose them to be co-operative with you, Mr. Cork says.

Just as important are sound cues. A friendly, genuine voice will predispose someone to listen to you, while an aggressive or nervous sound will turn off their reception.

Making eye contact is a particularly valuable tool; one of the simplest things to do is to try to see the color of a person's eyes when you are introducing yourself, he recommends. "You don't even have to remember the color, but in the time it takes to register, it demonstrates you are interested in them."

And remember body language. Don't cross your arms or hang back, which can be read as unfriendly.

Take notes. "As a courtesy, you should always ask first, but I don't remember anyone ever saying no if I want to write things down," Mr. Cork says.

Not only does it mean you don't have to rely on your memory but "when you take notes, you show the person you're taking an interest; it's not just going in one ear and out the other."

Details about family, interests and events you can refer to the next time you meet gives you common ground for discussion. "If someone comes up to you and asks about your wife and kids, the barrier is down. It says this person cares enough to get to know a little more about me and to remember it."

Keep a data base. Stashing cards in a file is ineffective because you can forget who gave it to you and why, Mr. Cork says. You retain more information if you write it out or type it into an electronic file.

Mr. Cork has a personal computerized contact file that he started 20 years ago and represents more than 20,000 people he has met.

There are 2,318 people he considers close networking acquaintances, with complete electronic files that include interests and family that he updates regularly. Figuring "conservatively" that each of these people also has a circle of about 200 contacts, he estimates that knowing just this smaller group gives him networking access to more than 460,000 people.

Get to the point. Whenever you meet someone, you have 30 seconds or less -- the average time of a television commercial -- to get your networking message across. More than that and attention starts to wander.

Ask each contact for two references. But don't make the request until you've earned the right. "If I have just met them, I may not ask immediately for a contact but the next day, I'll follow up with an e-mail," Mr. Cork says.

In that message, you can say: 'I don't want to put you on the spot but there's something we discussed that was very thought provoking. It would be great if you could give me two contacts to help me pursue it.'

That means you don't put the person immediately on the spot and also gives him or her some time to think about the best people to put you in touch with.

Seek help warming up a call. Ask the person who makes the referral to do a huge favor and get in touch with the contact on your behalf first. That way, the person will be expecting your call, you avoid uncomfortable introductions and you can move easily into a friendly discussion. In most cases, all it takes is you asking, Mr. Cork insists.

Be politely persistent. In most cases, you won't get a response from the person you are trying to reach on the first call. Mr. Cork says that's how a lot of people fail: they don't try again and again.

You should leave a message explaining the reason for your call, but you don't have to repeat it each time. If you keep getting a recording, try calling at different times and keep calling until you get the person live.

It may take five or more calls before you should start to take a hint. However, "I don't think you ever have to give up," he says. "They may not want to talk to you but if you are courteous, the worst thing that can happen is they will eventually call and say 'please stop calling me.' "

Most often, busy people don't return your call because they don't know you and you may not be high on their list of priorities. But most people will eventually reply if you keep telling them you want to reach them, Mr. Cork says. And invariably, they will try to be helpful, as long as you have prepared a compelling and succinct reason for them to help. The approach that works best is to tell them how much you value their expertise.

Follow up with a thank you. Express gratitude in as many ways as you can. Tell them they have done you a huge favor, thank them profusely and offer to help them in the future.

Always indicate your willingness to return a favor. If you are playing the asking game, you have to gain the right by offering something in return," Mr. Cork adds.

"Networking is really very simply about continually connecting with people, and it is really always about being willing to give, and not just in tangible things like gifts or services," Mr. Cork says.

You can send them something that relates to their interests. If they're a reader, send a book about the business topic you've discussed, along with a personal note. If they say they are not a big reader, ask if they'd like to have an audio version of the book to play in their car or an interesting music CD you've heard recently.

You can also offer your time, your experience and networking contacts to introduce them to other people that can help them. These are the things that will keep influential people in your circle of acquaintances, he notes.

Networking becomes easier and easier through habit, repetition and breaking the fear of rejection, Mr. Cork says. And it is the foundation you want to have firmly in place when it comes time to build your next career.

"People aren't strangers once you've met them. It's so much easier to meet the right people before you need their help."

So go ahead, feel free to soar with the eagles, and take your networking to the 'next' level, but to do this not only look into their eyes to see what color they are, but look deep to see what style and preferences color energy they are. In doing this, you will have connected to something much greater, a part of who they are at a much deeper and meaningful level.

By completing the Insight Discovery evaluator, you will learn what the four color energies of styles and preferences are for yourself, and by learning what yours are, it will provide you a more powerful way for you to connect with your staff, customers, and your 'next' work as you understand better what their color energies are through the skills you will develop.

Remember, you will become three to four times as effective in connecting with others, that can turn into a tremendous return on investment of your time and effort to learn this for yourself and applying it to your 'next' working skills.

Contact me for a free Insights Discovery profile, typically a \$745 value: robert@sicoraconsulting.com

Happy flying!