

EFFECTIVE NETWORKING FOR INTROVERTS

The Value and Opportunities of Individual Differences

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Networking as marketing. Effective networking can be seen as a process of marketing for mutual benefit. Start by reaching out for a possible professional relationship that seems beneficial. The connections you make can complement your strengths and enrich your approach to professional life. There can also be unanticipated opportunities for your own development and contributions to others. (See handout, *Ideas for Developing and Sustaining Networks.*)

Marketing in general is often organized by target groups or discrete categories of people. The assumption is that behavior and preferences can be predicted from common attributes of each group. In turn, that information determines strategies and goals of marketers.

No doubt you've seen this approach applied to categories such as black men, white women, introverts, extroverts, baby boomers, Gen X or Y. More severe slicing is portrayed in *Microtrends*, based on over 70 groups. Examples are Protestant Latinos, single women homeowners and older fathers.

This kind of focus can be useful in campaigns related to politics, hiring and product development. But effective networking is a more interactive, intimate process of mutual influence that reaches beyond neat groups. Instead, understanding what makes you and others unique is catalytic in meeting goals. It also avoids the dangers of drawing a cause and effect relationship between a person's category and behavior.

Networking as attending to uniqueness. In networking or any other worthwhile relationship-building process, generalizations about others distracts from seeing what makes each person unique, valuable and interesting. Without acknowledging individual differences, the mutual appreciation that supports good relationships is less likely to evolve.

When you really get to know someone, you've probably noticed some expectations are met, others not. Authenticity becomes more significant than predictability. In their complexity and ambiguity, the person's life stories and actions, linear or not, contribute to appreciating them and their value. And thank goodness people aren't that neat. They learn, grow and are dynamic, even over short periods of time. Imagine how boring life would be if you could anticipate everything and were never surprised.

Introversion as a range. So if you consider yourself an introvert, keep in mind that this category can relate to a range of behavior from asocial to quiet to just short of being an extrovert. Behavior can also vary with how you are feeling, whom you're with and your environment.

For those who want to verify their tendency toward introversion, here are examples of characteristics considered representative:

- Prefer to concentrate in a quiet environment.
- Appreciate details over generalizations.
- Want to know what's behind something.
- Will think about issues and situations a great deal before acting.
- Feel tired after, and perhaps in anticipation of, intense social interaction.

Wherever you fit on the continuum of introversion, imagine the guidance that the conceiver of introvert and extrovert categories may have given. Psychologist Carl Jung would probably have encouraged you to understand your tendencies as well as to develop under-expressed aspects such as your own version of extroversion. Know who you are, so you can determine how else you want to act, he might have counseled. In other words, rather than change who you are, explore a wider range of behaviors by experimenting in situations that are comfortable.

Networking as making choices. For now, here are a variety of suggestions to honor your introverted tendencies as you reach out to develop new or deeper relationships, to network to serve mutual interests. Select any that appeal. Adapt them to what makes sense for you and your situation. Add your own ideas in the spaces provided.

Choose

- Avoid noisy crowds in favor of sharing a meal in quiet situations that support engaging conversations.
- Experiment with writing e-mail and letters in which the content also gives recipients a sense of who you are and your interests through word choice, style, humor and information, for example.
- Join groups where you can discuss subjects that interest you instead of feel overwhelmed or bored by boisterousness, superficiality and self-congratulation.
- Keep in mind one goal you want to accomplish while you're at a get-together.
- Attend functions you like regularly so you become more at home.
- Connect with people who bring new as well as different experiences and perspectives in ways that are comfortable for you both.
- _____
- _____

Prepare

- Consider before get-togethers and meetings several, appropriate topics you enjoy and how you may discuss them.

Prepare (continued)

- Imagine a short script for yourself before returning or making a phone call.
- Make sure you have plenty of rest before participating in larger functions.
- Go or meet up with a partner or someone with whom you're comfortable when you attend a large gathering, as long as you don't stay joined at the hip. Possibly choose someone who can introduce you around and will not feel dropped as you engage with others. Of course, help them connect too.
- Identify relevant information you want to offer and how you will elicit information of interest to you.
- Prepare several very short, apt stories about your professional or personal life; tell them with passion, variety and originality, possibly showing how you overcame obstacles and learned something.
- Remind yourself of the worst thing that could happen and how you'd handle it to lessen any anxiety you may feel.
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Act

- Acknowledge that your listening skills are just as important as your speaking skills. Practice asking open-ended questions starting with "what" and "how." Feel free to paraphrase what's said. Obtain useful information for gauging and improving a situation by attending to body language, including your own.
- Give yourself permission to leave a large, unproductive function whenever you wish.
- Connect with people who seem kind and self-aware.
- Walk up to an individual who's alone and concentrate on helping them feel at ease.
- Stretch time when you don't have a pithy, quick response. For example, say something like, "I want to give this the thought it deserves. Can I get back to you on it?"
- Avoid, move away from or manage "interrupters." If you feel comfortable, say calmly with a smile, "Let me finish." And if you want to add some confident humor, "You may find it valuable (interesting, worthwhile)."
- Brush up on your conversational skills, perhaps practicing with unthreatening people whose company you enjoy.
- Be true to yourself, building on strengths such as integrity, quiet sense of humor and authenticity.
- _____
- _____

With whom would you want to practice any of this? Name a few people below.

When and how will you contact your partners for practice to arrange a time to meet?

What will you offer in return?

In addition to practice, look into books such as the two below. Take what's useful and leave the rest.

Goodbye to Shy by Leil Lowndes

The Art of Mingling: Proven Techniques for Mastering Any Room by Jeanne Martinet

Next step for you. After considering this handout, choose one action for follow up. Describe it briefly below and make time to do it on your schedule.

Final note. These suggestions are not about changing who you are, but:

- providing a wider repertoire for effective communication and self-presentation
- bringing greater ease to professional relationship-building
- enjoying social situations
- expanding your skills
- honoring what makes you and others unique
- strengthening your self-confidence
- meeting your goals

Please use this handout as you see fit.

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