



Six steps to  
raising your profile

# **NO-NONSENSE NETWORKING**

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## About the author



### **Jeanette Purcell**

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Jeanette is an accomplished international public speaker. She presents and writes on issues relating to leadership, business development and business education and has been instrumental in the delivery of Cass Leadership programmes in Dubai. Current corporate clients include Pfizer International where Jeanette delivers ‘networking skills’ training to high potential female managers.

In 2013 Jeanette founded the Brain Exchange, an exclusive forum for business professionals to exchange advice, knowledge and support in a confidential and professional environment. The Brain Exchange meets monthly in London and is achieving growing recognition as a high quality business network.

## **Table of contents**

Introduction	2
Step One - Developing the right attitude	7
Step Two - Preparing your pitch	13
Step Three - Managing your existing networks	16
Step Four - Preparing to network	19
Step Five - Networking events	22
Step Six - Building and maintaining the relationship	26
Over to you!	33
Acknowledgements	36

## INTRODUCTION

This book is full of practical tips and ideas on how to build long-lasting successful business relationships. It is based on my thirty years experience in business, my academic career and my countless conversations with great networkers and people who want to improve their networking skills. I felt compelled to write this book because I have observed that few people network effectively, and yet good networking skills are essential if you want to get on in business and have a fulfilling career. The book is written for anyone who wants to grow their business, extend their business networks or raise their profile within their profession or working environment. If you are looking for a job or preparing for promotion this book is also for you.

Networking gets a bad press. I frequently come across people who are cynical about networking or who have a deep aversion to the idea of networking as a valid business activity. Either they are unconvinced about the benefits of networking to them or their business, or they believe that they do not have the skills or the confidence to be a successful networker. Do you share this aversion? If you do, my aim is to convince you that networking will help you to advance your business and that it is possible to be a great networker without being an extrovert or a natural socialiser.

In this series of short chapters I will make the case for investing some time in networking, I will turn your negative thoughts into positive ones and give you a range of tips, tools and techniques to help you build your business networks with flair and confidence.

### What this book covers

I am going to take you through a practical approach to building a successful network in just six easy steps:

**1. Developing the right attitude.** You need to approach networking in a positive frame of mind. We debunk some of the myths about networking and deal with the common issues that hold people back from being enthusiastic and confident networkers.

**2. Preparing your pitch.** With the right attitude and a clear idea of what you want to achieve from your networking you are ready to write your ‘pitch’. We look at how to tell your story and present your skills in a concise, positive and memorable way.

**3. Managing your existing networks.** It’s not only about making new connections but also about managing your existing contacts. How well are you managing and tapping into your existing networks?

**4. Preparing to network.** Successful face-to-face networking begins with thorough preparation. We will cover the preparation required for every networking situation.

**5. Networking events.** From social gatherings to business meetings we look at how to manage networking situations, make the right connections and get results.

**6. Building and maintaining the relationship.** Truly successful networks require maintenance. We consider the follow up required to convert a new connection into a productive business relationship and how to sustain and grow your networks over the long term.

### **How to get the most out of this book**

To get the most out of this book approach it with an open mind and a genuine desire to learn and improve.

Read the book in the sequence it is written rather than dipping in to the chapters that most interest you. There is a logic to the structure and each section depends on your having read and understood the section before. You can always go back to the chapters that are most relevant to you when you have finished – that way you will be able to tackle each task with an understanding of the context and overall approach.

The action steps at the end of each chapter are important if you really want to make progress. We learn by doing, so please take a few moments to think about

what you have read and make some notes about the actions you are going to take. If you don't want to commit to all of the actions at least pick one or two that help you put your learning into practice. If you simply read this book without undertaking to do things differently nothing will change. All it takes is a few small steps to get you started – just try something!

### **Why does networking matter?**

There are many reasons why you should aim to be an effective networker. It's good for you, it's good for your career and it's good for your business. What's more, if you approach networking with the right attitude you will enjoy the activity and want to do it more. Here are my top five reasons why you should give this book your full attention and aim to be a great networker:

#### *Reason #1 – We do business with people we like and trust*

It's popular to believe that buying has become a depersonalised activity and that the hiring of staff is based purely on an objective assessment of a candidate's skills. But all my experience tells me that, even today, most transactions in business are about relationships. We do business with people we like and trust. You can achieve a certain amount through marketing and advertising campaigns and it is possible for selling to be a completely anonymous business, but at some stage your customer, client or prospective employer is likely to come face to face with YOU.

Their decision to buy or hire will be influenced by a range of factors which, at some level, will almost certainly include how much they like and trust you. Relationships are at the heart of any successful business. And so it is important to invest time in making connections, building relationships and maintaining those connections over time.

#### *Reason #2 – Word of mouth marketing really works*

I have been running a business for several years and ALL of my clients have come to me through word of mouth. Now, that's not unusual for my type of business but all companies, regardless of size or industry, rely to some extent

on word-of-mouth marketing.

Surveys into the impact of online marketing show that peer recommendation is the most trusted form of advertising, whereas online search, banner advertising and other ads are among the least trusted (NIELSEN - Global Online Consumer Survey - July 2009). Even with the explosion of online review applications (eg, Yelp, Google, Urbanspoon), research clearly demonstrates that word of mouth—product recommendations made by family, friends, work colleagues, or neighbours—is still the most effective way to win new customers. (The Harris Poll #74, June 3, 2010). At the same time, many people fail to recognise the value of customer referrals and the power of networking as a form of word-of-mouth marketing.

### *Reason #3 – Being good at your job is not enough*

Like it or not life is not a meritocracy. The truth is that your skills, qualities and experience are likely to go unnoticed unless you are prepared to promote yourself. This means seeking opportunities to communicate what you have to offer and your career aspirations. I'm not talking about trotting out a sales pitch to everyone you meet, but I am suggesting that a more proactive approach to advancing your career is required. And this involves building a useful supportive network.

### *Reason #4 – Well connected people are 'in the know'*

The surest way to pick up on a new opportunity - whether it's a new client, new job or changes in your market - is to be well connected. How many times have you heard about a job vacancy or a potential new project through a friend or work colleague? The grapevine is a wonderful and powerful communication channel and you should use it. By developing your networks you not only stand a better chance of knowing what's going on but you are also more likely to be remembered when one of your connections wants something that you offer. Networks are vital as a means of sharing knowledge and information. What's more, a good networker who enjoys meeting and learning about other people will broaden their outlook and develop a useful body of skills and knowledge, making them an interesting person to know.

*Reason #5 – Networks are a valuable source of support*

Networking is not just about finding opportunities and advancing your own interests. A good network is one that is based on give and take, trust and respect. There are people in my network who I know I can ask for help when I am thinking through a new idea or dealing with a particularly difficult problem. And they know I will do the same for them in return. If you build your network in the right way, you will find that it can be a valuable source of support and advice.



## CHAPTER ONE

### DEVELOPING THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

When I talk to people about my enthusiasm for networking I often get a negative reaction. Sometimes that reaction is based on the person's distaste for what they see as blatant self promotion: "Oh, I hate all that sort of thing" is a typical comment "all that showing off and schmoozing, it's not for me." On other occasions people have expressed their fear of networking: "I just can't do small talk" or "the thought of walking into a room full of people I don't know terrifies me".

These reactions are based on a misconception of what it means to be a truly effective networker. They also highlight some of the myths about networking that I want to debunk. These myths are preventing many people from making useful business connections, meeting new and interesting people and growing their business. And that's a great shame. We need to correct any negative perceptions of networking before going any further. Because without a positive attitude to networking you won't get very far and the experience will always feel uncomfortable and exhausting.

#### **What networking is not**

When asked to describe the activities they associate with 'networking' most people will talk about a crowded reception room, probably involving drinks and canapés, with people frantically 'working the room' and exchanging business cards. Correct? It's not a positive image is it? Well, in my view this image misrepresents the reality of successful networking.

Networking is *not* about:

- Attending numerous receptions and events in the hope of making a few tentative connections;
- Arrogance, self-promotion or pretending to be someone you're not;

- Collecting business cards, connections on LinkedIn, followers on Twitter or friends on facebook.

And believe it or not, networking is not all about YOU!

I once attended a business lecture about ‘Effective Networking’ held in the Middle East. The presenter was the owner of a business club and was clearly there to promote his club as a place to network and do business. I was so dismayed by his views on the subject of networking that I wrote down what he said, word for word.

*“When you are networking, do keep your face in everyone else’s and make sure everyone in the room knows who you are and what you do by the end of the night.”*

Would you really like to meet someone who behaved like this at an event you were attending? Perhaps you have experience of people who take this approach to networking. Take my word for it, this sort of behaviour does not work! Of course it is useful to attend networking events if they are relevant, and exchanging business cards on these occasions is customary practice. There are also times when it’s important to do a bit of self promotion when networking. But in my view none of these activities help to define the concept of networking.

### **What networking is**

This is my preferred definition:

*Networking is about building reciprocal relationships with people you like, admire and trust.*

If you can exchange your negative perception of networking with my new improved definition then, I promise you, the whole idea will become much more appealing and manageable.

I should say that my definition has been challenged. The challengers argue that my description of networking doesn’t apply in a hard-nosed sales environment

where the object is to get business regardless of the personalities and without any intention of building a long term relationship with customers. In response I concede that there are some occasions in certain business contexts where we have to do business with people we don't like. I also accept that, in some sales environments, there is no requirement or even opportunity to build lasting business relationships with clients. However, I would argue that these situations are increasingly rare. And I maintain that the general aim in networking should always be to build relationships with people you like admire and trust. If you do, you are likely to be a more successful networker in the long term.

### Overcoming barriers

Over many years of helping people to network better I have asked them to identify what it is that gets in the way of their efforts to network. Their responses tend to put the barriers into two categories – those which are 'external' (and therefore less easy to control) and others which are internal (or self-imposed). Let's take a look at some of the most common external obstacles.

*"I just don't have time"*

Lack of time is a regular complaint, particularly from people with young families or other commitments which give them less flexibility or time to network outside normal office hours.

Part of the answer here is to see networking as an integral part of your job rather than an optional extra to be fitted in when everything else is done. Networking is essential to you, your career and your business. It is just as important as completing your monthly report, maintaining your accounts or whatever your job entails. Accept networking as part of your weekly routine and find space for it in your calendar. I know a woman who, every week, tries to arrange lunch with someone in her company that she hasn't met or doesn't see regularly. This is her way of making the best use of her working day and of extending her connections in an informal, yet highly effective way. Networking events are useful but you can do a lot of productive networking without ever attending a drinks reception. And the more focused your approach to networking is, the more selective you can be about the events that you do attend.

*“My boss/partner/company doesn’t encourage or support my networking.”*

Networking is more difficult if it is not seen as valuable or important by the people around you – either at home or at work. If you have to account for the time you spend networking to an unsupportive boss you are less likely to give networking the priority it deserves. One response to this is to find out whether there is an underlying reason for this lack of support so that your response can address the real cause. What is it that’s preventing others from giving you the encouragement you need? Perhaps your boss’s perception of networking is based on the same misunderstanding that I discussed earlier. If so, try to demonstrate to them how networking will make a positive difference to the business. Try to find examples of how networking has benefited other people or organisations. If the ‘blocker’ is your partner, try to explain that your networking is an important part of your job, not a social activity or an optional extra.

You could suggest to whoever is blocking your progress that you attend a networking event together. You could even ask for their help in developing a networking initiative. Sometimes the idea of something becomes less threatening to people when they are involved in the activity and experience the benefits for themselves.

And what about the ‘internal’ or self-imposed barriers to networking?

The internal barriers to networking are almost always connected with fear or lack of confidence. We fear failure, rejection or embarrassment if our efforts fail. We become stressed at the thought of having to try something new or which takes us out of our comfort zone. One participant at the start of a workshop said to me, “There is nothing to enjoy about networking. I am just hopeless at initiating conversations with people I don’t know.” That’s honest, and it’s a fairly typical comment!

This book provides a range of strategies for overcoming these fears, large and small. And the first step is to keep the new improved definition of networking at the front of your mind at all times:

*“Networking is about building reciprocal relationships  
with people you like, admire and trust”*

This will help to remind you that networking ought to be a manageable enjoyable activity which can accommodate your own style and way of working. It's true that sometimes you have to step outside of your comfort zone to make new connections, but try to ensure that your approach allows you to be yourself and reflects your own personality. We can't all be charismatic socialites – and that is not the aim here. If you aim to be an authentic networker, using the approach that feels right for you, you will begin to experience less anxiety and gain more confidence.

### **Identify your objectives**

Without some idea of what you want to achieve from your networking – even if it is simply to raise your profile within your industry or profession – your networking is likely to lack focus. There aren't enough hours in the day to be best buddies with every new person you meet or to go to every conference or reception you're invited to. Being clear about your objectives will help you to be a more discriminating, efficient, and therefore more effective networker. It will also help you to present yourself effectively and to clearly articulate your goals and aspirations when you need to.

So have some objectives in mind. Do you have a long term goal, such as changing your career or growing a new business? A long-term goal will help you to work out what information you need, who to consult or where you might meet people who could help you. Even if you are not clear about the long term goal, each networking opportunity, whether it is a meeting with a new contact or a networking reception, should be approached with some sort of objective in mind. What do you want to get out of the meeting? What are you hoping to learn from the event? You might simply be interested in getting yourself known and making contacts in a new business environment – that's fine. Just be clear about what you want to achieve – that way your networking efforts are likely to be more focussed and therefore more successful.

Before we leave the subject of setting objectives let's remember that successful networking is as much about giving as taking. Although it's important to be clear about what you want in return for your efforts I would never recommend limiting your networking to only those people who can help you. That would make you a rather shallow networker. In any case, it's not always possible at a first meeting to know whether someone might be helpful to you in the future. When I look at my networks and consider the relationships that have been most valuable to me over time, I realise that my decision to put some effort into building the relationship was influenced by at least one of six factors.

1. I liked them.
2. I was interested in or respected them.
3. I thought I could learn from them.
4. I thought they could help me.
5. I wanted to help them.
6. I trusted them.

So think about these six factors when you network and be open to forging new relationships with a wide spectrum of interesting people.

### **Review and action**

- **Think about what is preventing you from networking (or from networking more) and find a strategy for overcoming the obstacle.**
- **Think about what you want to achieve from networking and clearly articulate your objective – writing it down will help.**

## CHAPTER TWO

### PREPARING YOUR PITCH

Now you have got yourself into a more positive frame of mind and have identified what you want to achieve through networking you are probably eager to get going. But before you rush off to that glitzy reception or important business meeting let's think about how you will answer the question "what do you do?". Are you ready to respond with a description that presents you in a positive light, highlighting your qualities and capturing the interest of your listener? What we are talking about here is often referred to as the 'elevator pitch'. The idea behind the 'elevator pitch' is based on an imaginary scenario. You step into the lift on the ground floor of an office block with someone who you really want to impress. As they press the button for the 10th floor they turn to say "hello" and ask you what you do. You have just sixty seconds (or however long it takes to reach the tenth floor) to deliver your 'pitch', which will ideally spark their interest in you and leave them wanting to know more.

The 'pitch' is no more than a concise statement of who you are and what you've got to offer – presented in a powerful, positive and memorable way. A good pitch is important because, for most networking situations, you only have a brief opportunity to make an impact and to generate some interest in what you do. So it is a good idea to spend some time writing and practising your pitch.

Of course in reality you will never read your pitch like a script, indeed it is unlikely that you will ever deliver the pitch exactly as it is written. But if you have written and practiced it you will find that you can easily adapt it for different situations, drawing on the words and phrases that you have carefully crafted. The words you have rehearsed will then feel familiar to you, and this means you will deliver them with more confidence and authenticity.

## Writing your pitch

A good pitch should be short, punchy, memorable and relevant (and of course it must be true!). Your pitch should ideally have:

- A short interesting description of who you are and what you do. Try not to be defined by your job title (especially if your job title is technical or meaningless to others). What is it about your job that will be interesting to others? (For instance, “I get people to love accountants” is more engaging than “I am the Director of Media Relations for an accountancy institution.”)
- A ‘hook’ – something that grabs the person’s attention and makes them want to know more. I once heard a photographer say “we make sure you never forget” – that’s an example of a great hook.
- Your ‘best bits’ – the things that are special and unique about you and that set you apart from other people.
- Interest and enthusiasm. You need to convey some passion and energy. This is partly achieved by positive body language but you can also inject some enthusiasm into your written pitch.
- A request. What do you want from the other person? A meeting with them? An introduction to someone they know? Their advice? Ask them! Too often we stop short of asking for what we want.

To illustrate the pitch and its content here’s an example:

“Hello, I’m Jeanette Purcell. I am an international specialist in the practice of leadership.

**(HOOK)**

My coaching and training programmes are based on 30 years experience of leading people and teams in a range of businesses. I understand what leaders have to deal with every day and what skills they need to be successful. I don’t do off-the-shelf training



– every intervention is unique, designed for the client’s particular needs. And I focus on delivering solutions that have a measurable, long-term impact on the bottom line.

**(BEST BITS – WHY I’M DIFFERENT)**

I was interested to hear that your company is about to enter a new phase in its development and I would love to talk to you about what impact this change might have on your team.

**(INTEREST, ENTHUSIASM)**

When would it be possible to meet for a coffee?”

**(REQUEST)**

### **Practising your pitch**

When you have written something down, practice saying the words out loud – preferably in front of a mirror. Even better, try practicing your pitch in front of a friend or colleague to get their impressions and feedback, or record your pitch and play it back to see if it sounds natural, energetic and compelling. Refine and rehearse your pitch until you feel confident about introducing yourself in this way. Remember, if you can’t present yourself in an engaging and positive way, how can you expect people to be interested in you or to recommend you to others?

### **Review and action**

- **Write your pitch, making it concise, interesting and memorable.**
- **Practice your pitch and refine it if necessary until you are entirely comfortable with the words and can deliver it with confidence.**

## CHAPTER THREE

### MANAGING YOUR EXISTING NETWORKS

Your next step is to organise and manage your existing networks. Your networks, however small, are the primary and most important resource for getting support and building new connections. Trying to build new connections from scratch is incredibly difficult, whereas asking existing connections to help you or to introduce you to new people is relatively easy. So have you really looked at the contacts you already have and are you managing these networks effectively?

You could start with organising your contacts into three categories.

#### Close contacts

We will call the first category your ‘close contacts’. This category includes people who you have an immediate and regular connection with, either through work, a friendship or family. These are the people who you can rely on for help when you need it and who you are always ready to help in return. The people you place in this category are highly valuable to you – you should nurture these relationships, making sure they are truly reciprocal, based on give and take, trust and respect. When you are in need of advice, help or an introduction to a new contact, your first consideration should always be, “is there someone in my ‘close contacts’ group who can help me with this?”.

#### Distant contacts

The second category is ‘distant contacts’. This category includes people who are not in your immediate network of friends, colleagues and family but with whom you have some form of connection, even if it is intermittent. You might include in this category people you have worked with in the past and see or hear from occasionally, or they might be friends of friends who you have met and get along with. Friends from the past who you liked but no longer see on a regular basis might also fit in this category. These ‘distant contacts’ are also an important part of your network and you should ask yourself whether you are

doing enough to stay in touch with these people or whether you would like to resurrect a dormant relationship. This group is an essential resource when you are unable to find the help you need from your ‘close contacts’. So look after your ‘distant contacts’ and don’t lose touch with them completely.

### **Target contacts**

The third category is ‘target contacts’. These are the people who you currently have no connection with but would like to get to know; either because you are interested in them, you would like their advice or feel they can offer you some practical help. Whatever the reason, you have decided that you would like these people in your network.

If your existing contacts (the first and second categories above) can’t help you to make a connection with a target contact you will need to cast the net a bit wider and find other ways of getting to know these people. There is usually a way.

### **Social media**

I am often asked about the importance of social media in the context of business networking. Sites such as LinkedIn and Twitter are an essential part of building networks and are important resources in terms of finding and meeting new contacts (I don’t use Facebook because I think it’s inappropriate for my type of business, but I can see how it would be relevant for other companies). If you are struggling to reach a target contact and your existing contacts can’t help you these sites can provide a route to that connection. Social media is also an essential marketing tool if you want to raise your visibility and get noticed for what you do. For instance, every post and comment that I make on LinkedIn and Twitter is designed to reflect my positioning as a leadership and change management specialist. I might make a comment about a political leader or a topical business issue – whatever it is, my social media presence helps to endorse my expertise and what I stand for. But do not be tempted to rely solely on social media sites for your networking – they are a tool, not a solution. Face-to-face contact is always best. It is not the number of connections you have that matters, but the quality of those relationships.

So remember, existing contacts are always your first resource when networking. Too often we try to make progress or take on new challenges by rushing out into the unknown, ignoring the support and advice that is right under our nose. What's more, we should never underestimate people's willingness to help. If you ask people politely for their advice they will probably be flattered and happy to impart some of their knowledge and wisdom.

### **Review and action**

- **Organise your existing contacts into two categories and create a new category for 'target contacts'.**
- **Re-connect with valuable contacts that you haven't met or spoken to for a while.**
- **Identify people from within your existing contacts who might be able to help you reach a 'target contact'.**
- **Use social media to reach new contacts if necessary, and think about how you are positioning yourself on social media sites.**

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PREPARING TO NETWORK

OK. You've thought about what you want to achieve from your networking, written your pitch, organised your existing contacts and identified some target contacts. Now you can approach the task of making new connections and developing both old and new relationships. If you are going to start including new people into your network you will need to be using all opportunities to meet them – attending events, volunteering to take on new projects, making the most of business meetings and even social gatherings. The aim is to make yourself visible and to be proactive about making new connections. And the starting point, as with most tasks, is thorough preparation. Whether you are attending a networking event, a conference, a business meeting with a small group or a one-to-one meeting with a contact, you must prepare well to ensure that you get the most out of the opportunity. If you are well-organised in advance you will handle the event with confidence and will be more likely to achieve your goal.

Here are the steps to cover in your preparation:

- Consider what you want to get out of a networking opportunity. Be clear about your ideal outcome and plan to achieve that result. You should pick and choose events carefully, targeting those that are most relevant to you and which are likely to result in some useful new connections. This is particularly important when time is precious or you are constrained by other commitments. The scattergun technique – getting involved in everything 'just in case' - is less effective (and more exhausting) than a planned, focused approach.
- Can you find someone to go with you to the event? It's easier to walk into a crowded room if you're with someone else and, being with a friend or colleague makes the exercise less daunting. But do make sure you split up once you have arrived otherwise you'll spend the whole evening chatting to each other and won't make any new contacts.

- In advance of the event, see if you can find out who is attending. Often the organisers will have a delegate list and will be willing to share it with you. If this is a formal dinner you should be able to find out who you are sitting next to so that you can do some research into them beforehand. You need to make sure your conversations with people demonstrate your interest in their world, and you can only do this by understanding a bit about what they do.
- Are there people attending the meeting or event who you would particularly like to meet? Why not email them in advance saying you'd love to have a chat with them at the function and suggesting a time and meeting place? Or you could ask the organiser, prior to the event, to introduce you to certain people on the day – most hosts would be happy to do this. If you have an idea of the people you want to connect with and do some emailing beforehand, you will feel more in control and will stand a better chance of ensuring that your time at the event is well spent.
- Think about whether you can help someone out at the event or meeting. Do you know someone else who is attending for the first time? Perhaps you can arrange to introduce them to people you know. Most newcomers are so grateful when someone takes the trouble to welcome them into a new situation – why not be that welcoming person?
- If you are terrified at the thought of 'small talk' and the prospect of having nothing to say, why not read the newspaper particularly thoroughly that morning? It is always useful to know a bit about what's going on in the world so that you can take part in conversations on a range of topics.
- Review and practice your pitch so that when you are asked "what do you do?" you are ready with a concise, engaging response.

## **Review and action**

- **Consider the ways in which you could improve your visibility and be a more proactive networker.**
- **Use this chapter as your preparation checklist prior to events, meetings or any situation where there are potential networking opportunities.**

## CHAPTER FIVE

### NETWORKING EVENTS

If you have done your preparation you will already be feeling confident about attending business events and making the most of the opportunity to network. Ideally you will be focused on finding your target contacts, helping others where you can, and looking forward to some interesting conversations. However, if you are still terrified about taking the first few steps into that crowded room try the following:

- Arrive early. You are more likely to find people to talk to if you are amongst the first to arrive. Being early also allows you to do some ground work by talking to the organisers, reading the delegate list or familiarising yourself with the agenda for the meeting.
- Make sure you are carrying a stock of pristine business cards in an easily accessible place. Have a pen ready too so that you can make short notes on the business cards you receive. These notes can be essential the next day when you are trying to put a face to each business card you have collected. For example, I might write ‘red jacket, lives in Stockholm, knows Martin Sorrell’ on someone’s business card to jog my memory and to record useful facts). *\*However beware! In Asian cultures it is considered unacceptable to write comments on another person’s business card in their presence.*
- If you happen to meet a fellow delegate or guest before you enter the room (perhaps at the registration desk or in the cloakroom) say “hello” and open up a conversation with them – something like “are you attending the event?” is a good start. If you start chatting you will probably end up walking in with them and that will immediately make you feel more confident and relaxed. You can also congratulate yourself on making a new contact before you have even entered the room!
- If you are apprehensive about walking up to a group that is already in conversation try targeting a cluster of three people. It is said that groups of three are more likely to welcome you than groups of two, four or more



people. The rationale is that one of the three people is likely to be less engaged than the other two and will therefore be more open to striking up a new conversation with you.

- Approach groups with a confident stance and a winning smile (see ‘body language’ below). “Hi, I’m (Jeanette), can I join you?” is all you need to say.
- If you see someone on their own, introduce yourself and help them to join a group. They will love you for it and will remember you as a thoughtful person.
- Have your conversation openers ready. ‘Openers’ normally take the form of questions beginning with ‘what’, ‘why’, ‘how’, ‘where’ and ‘when’. They are designed to get conversations started and to demonstrate your interest in others. “What do you do?” or “When did you join your company?” or “How did you get involved in XX?” are all examples of conversation openers. But don’t just throw the questions out there, really listen to the answer and be interested in the person’s response. In this way the conversation will develop and you will start to relax.
- When asked the question “What do you do?” be ready with your answer (which of course will be based on your pitch – see Chapter Two). But resist the temptation to launch into your full pitch – in these situations the more concise your answer is the better. If people are interested in your short response they will ask for more information which will give you an opportunity to expand.
- If you have spent time chatting with one group and want to move on to meet more people, don’t worry about making excuses. It is enough to shake hands and say “Well, it was so nice to meet you”, exchanging business cards or agreeing to meet up later if appropriate. Most people recognise that it is important to circulate at these functions and, if you have listened and shown genuine interest in them, they will not be offended when you move on.

- Managing food and drink at a stand up event can be a challenge, especially when you want to look your best and give your undivided attention to other people. Sometimes it is better to eat beforehand (if you can) and stick to one glass of wine.
- Focus on the quality of your conversations not the quantity. In a large group setting you should circulate and meet new people but don't try to talk to everyone. If you have had a few meaningful conversations and have agreed to follow up with one or two new contacts I would consider that a result.

## Body language

Thorough preparation, a great pitch and effective networking techniques are all very well but negative body language can quickly undo all that hard work. Poise and confidence are key when you walk into the room or when you start up a new conversation. Of course, the more prepared you are the more likely you are to walk and talk with confidence. But what more can you do to ensure that any anxieties and nerves you have are kept in check? There are so many books on relaxation techniques and body language that I am going to limit my advice to three key points:

- **Smile!** It is sometimes difficult to smile if you feel tense, if you are trying to listen or if you are concentrating on getting your message across. But a smile when you walk into the room and when you are introduced to someone can make all the difference. And a pitch delivered with a smile can win over even the most reluctant listener. When a person smiles they convey confidence and enthusiasm.

A smile helps to put other people at their ease and draws them in to your conversation – you become someone they would like to talk to. However a smile doesn't just involve turning up the corners of your mouth - it is conveyed by the eyes too. So practice in the mirror to ensure that your smile does not come across as an inane grin. And although a smile is important it should be measured and used appropriately, according to the situation.

- **Walk tall!** When we are feeling nervous or self-conscious we are often responding to a sub-conscious desire to retreat or stay ‘under cover’ in new or potentially threatening situations. This inner anxiety is sometimes displayed outwardly by a stooping or hunched posture. If you are mindful of this tendency you can take steps to correct it. When walking and talking, lift your head and shoulders to achieve your full height. It is often helpful to imagine that you are being pulled upwards by a vertical thread attached to the crown of your head (lifting the top of your head but keeping your chin down). Another effective strategy is to find a private space (perhaps a cloakroom or your office) immediately before your important meeting and stand with your arms spread out wide and high above your head (in a star shape). Keep them there for a minute and imagine that you are filling the room with your presence. Next, slowly relax the arms, bringing them back to your side while still remaining conscious of the height and space you have created. This wide stretch should help you to maintain a tall confident stance as you walk out of the room and into your meeting.
- **Breathe!** Practice breathing deeply and slowly through your nose to calm your nerves and to control your speech. When nerves take over, our breathing becomes shallower and more rapid and this in turn can make us tremble, we speak too quickly and the tone of our voice becomes more high-pitched. Deep steady breathing (filling the chest with air by pulling down from the diaphragm) for about two minutes will help you to relax and regulate your tone of voice.

### **Review and action**

- **When you are next attending an important event with networking opportunities try using some of the techniques in this chapter to help you conquer any anxieties and improve your networking skills.**
- **Practice smiling, standing tall and deep breathing to help you convey confidence and positivity.**

## CHAPTER SIX

### BUILDING AND MAINTAINING THE RELATIONSHIP

It would be nice to think that if we use our best networking skills at events, give out plenty of business cards and make a good first impression with people, they will be emailing us the very next day asking for a further meeting. Sadly, for the majority of us, that's unlikely to happen. If you have met someone at an event who you would like to know better it is your responsibility to take things forward. You need to do some immediate follow-up and put effort into developing the connection in order to turn your new contact into a long-lasting valuable relationship. Without follow-up, all the effort that you have put into the initial conversation will be wasted and a good potential contact will slip away.

#### Immediate follow-up

Following up with a new contact is very important, particularly if you have 'clicked' with the person and believe that they would be a great addition to your network. In such cases these are the follow up steps you should take:

- Send your new contact an email immediately after meeting them (ideally the same day or the following day). The nature and content of your email will depend on how your initial conversation with them went. But you might suggest a coffee or lunch to follow up on your first meeting. You could send them a link to your website, an article or news item relevant to your conversation. The email should be short and friendly (not pushy!) emphasising how much you enjoyed meeting them. If you are able to personalise your email so much the better (for instance, you could wish them a happy holiday if they mentioned they were about to go away). For really special people a hand-written note on the back of a beautiful postcard is a good idea – guaranteed to get attention! Personal touches like this demonstrate that you were listening to and are interested in your contact. They also help to avoid giving any impression that you are sending them a 'stock' follow up email.

- Enter the person's name and contact details on your 'target contacts' list with a calendar reminder to phone them in a couple of days (if you have received no reply by then). Record any other useful information at the same time such as the person's interests, where you met them, ideas for future discussions with them.
- Follow the person on Twitter (you can even tweet something like 'Great to meet @SueSmith at City Networkers event last night').
- Connect with them on LinkedIn.
- If they don't respond to your email, try calling them a week later. Phone calls are harder to ignore and make it more difficult for the person to say 'no'!

### Successful business conversations

Great! Your follow up email or phone call has led to a second meeting with your new contact. This meeting is your opportunity to find out more about the other person and build trust and respect with them. It is likely to involve a more in-depth conversation and its success will depend on your ability to listen, respond and present yourself effectively. It is impossible to cover all possible meeting scenarios here. But we can safely assume that, if you want to build a relationship with this person (because you like them, you are interested in them, you want to help them or you think they could help you) then you will want them to walk away from this meeting with a positive impression of you. How is this achieved?

When engaging in business conversations of this nature the aim is:

- To be genuinely interested in the person;
- To express your interest by asking questions, reflecting on the other person's comments and clarifying your understanding;

- To promote yourself positively and concisely when the opportunity arises – either by the way in which you respond to questions or by talking about yourself in a way that is relevant and interesting to the other person (for example: “I’m interested in what you have said about the impact of restructuring on your business. I recently ran a change programme for a client who was going through a similar experience and the results of that programme were x,y,z.”)
- To ask for help or give some help.

If you’ve been paying attention up to now you won’t be surprised to hear that this meeting is more likely to be successful if you prepare for it. Be clear about your objective, anticipate the other person’s questions and have some answers ready, rehearse the way you will present your ideas. If there is no particular agenda for your meeting then treat this as an opportunity to do some fact-finding. The fact-finding approach is a great way to improve your understanding of the situation and demonstrates your interest in the other person, their role and their challenges. A successful meeting with your new contact involves a lot of listening and the use of intelligent questions. Here’s a useful crib sheet for this type of conversation.

**1. Open with a brief introduction and explanation for the discussion.** “I’m interested in getting some feedback on X” or “I’d appreciate some advice on Y” or “I’m doing some fact-finding about Z” or just “I’m interested in your company and its plans”.

**2. Use open questions.** (Who? What? Why? How? When?) “Why do you think that’s happening?” or “Who would be a good person to speak to about that?” or “What do you think would improve that situation?”

**3. Use affirmative statements.** “I see” or “that’s interesting”

**4. Check your body language.** Smile, nod or show concern as appropriate. Keep an open posture (arms uncrossed, lean forward), maintain some eye contact and don’t fidget!

**5. Explore the relevant issues further.** Control and direct the conversation by picking up on points that are useful to you. For instance, “that’s interesting, can you expand on that point?”

**6. Clarify and check understanding.** “So, if I have understood this correctly...” or “so I think you’re saying that...” Or “so just to be clear...”

**7. Make suggestions** or respond with a relevant experience. For instance “have you considered X?” or “a possible way forward might be ..”

**8. Summarise and suggest next steps.** “So, can I just recap – (points a, b, and c)” or “I’d like to come back to you by (date) with some options” or “It would be helpful if you could introduce me to Y”

**9. Thank them!** “I really appreciate you taking the time to see me. It’s been very useful.”

Every situation is different and you’ll need to use some judgement about what is appropriate or effective in each case. The point is, be prepared to listen and fully attend to the other person – sounds easy but few people can do this well.

## Sales conversations

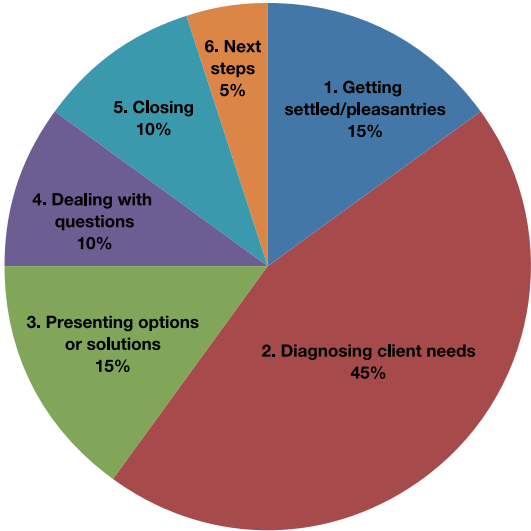
In sales situations (i.e. where your main objective is to get the person to hire you or give you work) face-to-face conversations provide an ideal opportunity for winning people over. It’s a shame then, that these occasions are sometimes poorly managed. After putting effort into networking and persuading a new contact to meet for an in-depth discussion we often mess up or fail to capitalise on that opportunity. Why is this? Most of the time it’s because we are so intent on selling ourselves or our ideas that we forget to listen. Remember, the aim is not to dump information on your contact. Rather, the intention is to identify what their problem or challenge is, show how you can help them and then obtain a positive response.

Even in pure sales situations a great deal of the conversation will still involve listening, asking questions and displaying interest in what the other person is

saying. If you can spend time encouraging your contact to talk, and being genuinely interested, they will be impressed. And that’s how you begin to establish a sustainable trusting relationship – the kind of relationship that is more likely to bring you business.

The following diagram demonstrates the various stages involved in a successful discussion with a client where the objective is to get a sale. This format is not intended to be prescriptive. It simply illustrates just how much time is spent understanding the client and diagnosing their needs. Of course, you still have to describe the benefits of what you do and you have to close the sale (it’s surprising how many people shy away from this crucial bit!) but those parts take up relatively less time.

### The 1 Hour Client Conversation



### Maintaining the relationship

After your second meeting with a new contact send them an email thanking them for their time and summarising what you agreed. Keep to your side of the deal by completing any actions as soon as you can, then make a diary note to



catch up with the person again (if this is appropriate) in, say, 2-4 weeks time. If the meeting has gone really well there will be a clear reason for staying in contact and you won't need to work quite as hard. Otherwise you should take responsibility for keeping in touch and for building the relationship over time. This is where your database of business contacts comes in. You should be checking your list of contacts regularly to ensure that you are following up and checking-in with your connections, especially new ones. A friendly email or phone call every 2-3 months suggesting a coffee and a chat to catch up is all that's required.

Keeping in touch with people is so much easier when there is a reason to make contact. That's why it's important to maintain an interest in what people are up to, their interests and aspirations. Try to think about what you can do for your new contact to deepen the relationship and make it mutually beneficial. If you see an article or news item that could interest them send them the link, or perhaps you can introduce them to a new contact from within your own network. I once sat next to a woman for two days during a conference and we got on well. She told me that she lived on a houseboat and I asked her if she had read "Offshore", a story based on a community of houseboat owners by Penelope Fitzgerald. My new contact said she loved reading and was surprised she hadn't come across this novel. When I got home I posted a copy of the book to her - it took 10 minutes and cost less than £7. My contact was delighted and called to thank me the next day - we have stayed in touch ever since even though our paths haven't crossed again. Of course you don't have to go to these lengths every time, but this is an example of how a thoughtful gesture can help to consolidate a relationship. Even the smallest acts of kindness, such as congratulating someone when they get a new job or giving praise when a colleague completes a difficult project, are highly valuable and help to make business relationships more human.

Be patient if your networking efforts don't immediately achieve results. Stay politely persistent with your contacts and build momentum. Remember, the truly valuable relationships are those that are nurtured over time so be prepared to invest effort into building and maintaining your networks. However it should also be recognised that, despite all your best intentions, not all of your new contacts will develop into long-lasting, reciprocal relationships. If you are not

getting any response to your emails or if you feel that the relationship is all one-sided, be prepared to admit defeat and move on. If you have got the general approach right you will find that for every connection which fails to grow, many others will flourish. Just keep going!

### **Review and action**

- **Make ‘follow up’ part of your networking routine – it’s a ‘must do’ task the day after a networking event or after any first meeting with someone you would like in your network.**
- **At the second or in-depth meeting with a new contact try using the business conversation crib sheet or a variation of this.**
- **Maintain and manage your database of contacts – it should prompt you to follow up on new connections and to keep in touch with all your contacts.**

## OVER TO YOU!

In this book we have covered all the essential steps you need to take to be a successful networker, from developing a positive attitude and preparing thoroughly through to nurturing new contacts and maintaining the relationship over time.

To recap:



I hope you have found the advice and suggestions in this book useful. Make sure you try out some of the ideas before dismissing them as ‘too scary’ or just ‘not for me’. Push yourself to get out of your comfort zone. A few steps down an untried path and then a lot of practice are often all it takes to develop new skills and achieve great things.

And if you don’t believe me, these words should give you inspiration and comfort. They are from a Director at a major pharmaceutical company who attended one of my workshops and wrote to me one year after the event.

*“Hi Jeanette, I wanted to share a networking success story with you as you were my inspiration. I started working with an industry-wide group developing new science apprenticeship standards across the UK. This has given me many opportunities to use my new found networking skills and I ended up in No. 10 Downing Street two weeks ago with George Osborne. Not only that but I have been invited back this week for a round table consultation. Honestly this is all thanks to you. You gave me the confidence to get out there and push myself forward without feeling pushy and to focus on quality not quantity. So I wanted to say a huge thanks!”*

This Director found an approach to networking that she felt comfortable with and that achieved results – so can you. Remember networking is no more than:

*“developing reciprocal relationships with people you like admire and trust”*

Why wouldn’t you want to do that?

**Good luck!**

We're here to help, whether you want to improve your networking skills, develop your business or simply become a better leader. For information about Jeanette Purcell Associates visit [www.jeanettepurcell.com](http://www.jeanettepurcell.com) or contact Jeanette on [jeanette@jeanettepurcell.com](mailto:jeanette@jeanettepurcell.com).

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