



Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.)

Topic: Networking

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Welcome

When did we start "networking"? I remember a time when people and businesses operated in a smaller universe and no one ever used that term "networking".

Now, people's careers are built upon their ability to network. Associations program to meet their member's needs to network. Businesses want their people better connected internally and externally and therefore often fund the effort to network.

Meetings are the conduit to networking. I write in this issue about ways to improve the networking component of meetings and your personal networking techniques.

Sue

[Sue Tinnish](#)

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Capitalize on Social Capital

In a past issue of T.I.M.E., I have written about the importance of emotional intelligence (June 2001) . As the United States has become more service oriented and less dependent upon manufacturing, the skills that make people successful also change. The traditional view as to what it is that makes someone successful generally involves traits customarily regarded as "individual" traits such as natural talent, intelligence, education and effort.

Another way to think about emotional intelligence is as our "social capital" as opposed

The main idea of social capital is that social networks have value. Social capital refers to the collective value of all "social networks" [who people know] and the ability of people within those networks to do things for each other ["norms of reciprocity"]. Social capital flows from the trust, reciprocity, information, and cooperation.

What organization doesn't strive for trust, reciprocity, or cooperation. Throughout the centuries, people have created social networks. Consider some of these examples:

- Neighbors who informally keep an eye on one another's homes
- Barn-raising on the frontier
- E-mail Listservs or exchanges

Robert Putnam, writes in his book, *Bowling Alone*, that "Social capital can be found in friendship networks, neighborhoods, churches, schools, bridge clubs, civic associations, and even bars. The motto of the Cheers Bar "where everybody knows your name" captures one important aspect of social capital."

Meetings inherently have the advantage of allowing people to develop face-to-face relationships. So whether networking is on the formal agenda of a meeting or not, everyone at the meeting has the capacity to build better relationships and capitalize on his or her social capital!

To order or read more about Robert Putnam's book, *Bowling Alone*, click



here:

What's ROR?

Why "waste time" on networking? There is a growing body of research that supports previous anecdotal evidence that social capital increases performance, relationships and even one's health. Individuals who network and build social capital are more influential, effective and happier than those who are unwilling or unable to benefit from the power of social capital. Successful people know how to develop rich social capital and reap the benefits in their business, professional and personal networks.

BNI, a formal business networking group, talks about "Return on Relationships".

Association and companies have found that social networks facilitate:

- Information flows
- Bonding between like individuals
- Bridging networks that connect individuals who are diverse
- Collective action (teams)
- Broader identities and culture. Social networks help translate an "I" mentality into a "we" mentality.

The balance of this issue talks about ways to informally and formally create better networks and networking in your meetings.

Don't be a Hunter

When networking, don't act like a hunter -- prowling for the contacts that will help you out.

Two reasons why. First, networking solely for your own benefit will fail. Building networks enables each of us to contribute to others and to tap into the law of reciprocity. Without reciprocity, a network will collapse. People will see through you as a taker and not a giver.

Second, you will be surprised to learn the many ways people can be of value to your network.

Wayne Baker, in "Achieving Success Through Social Capital", points out that weak and strong ties are important in a network. You can classify your relationships as having "weak" or "strong" ties. Both types can be valuable. Professor Mark Granovetter, of Stanford University's sociology department, first identified the importance of weak ties in his 1974 book, "Getting a Job: A Study in Contacts and Careers." Granovetter found that weak ties were far more effective for finding a job than strong ties.

When you meet someone, be ready to be surprised how they can help you! Successful businesspeople tend to have a broad network of both strong and weak ties. Weak ties are important because they usually bring new information. They tend to consist of people very different from you so they provide access to knowledge, markets and people to which you would otherwise have no access.

In contrast, you will establish strong ties with people who tend to be similar in gender, race, socio-economic background, cultural background, religion and other attributes. The strong relationships don't always offer as much "value" in the form of information or insight. Although your weak ties can produce great value, it is typically the strong ties that provide you with a sense of camaraderie, comfort and security.

Weak ties are easy to maintain, and therefore it is far easier to have many weak ties than many strong ties.

Given the different roles that strong and weak links offer, you can approach any new

contact as a worthwhile part of your network. Aim for a combination of strong ties and weak ties to cement a high-value network.

Beyond the Business Card Exchange

Beyond the business card exchange, here are seven ideas I like for networking:

1. Map Magic. Place a large map in your meeting room and provide meeting participants with a toothpick flag or slip of paper. Ask people to write their name on the slip of paper or flag and place it on the location of the town they were born. If using slips of paper, provide everyone with a push pin or tape so they can "stick" their names over their hometowns.

Or you can encourage people to put push pins in every state/country they have visited. Optional: Have everyone share one story about their travels. Give a prize to the person who has travelled to the most places.

2. Nametags. Get creative with your nametags and encourage meeting attendees to write short answers to questions on the bottom of their nametags. Pose questions that will allow people to find commonalities or interesting things about each other. Sample questions:
 - o Chocolate or vanilla ice cream?
 - o Number of siblings
 - o Number of years in association/company
 - o Number of jobs held in career
 - o Favorite color
 - o Pet's names

As people mingle, they will be able to immediately know something about their fellow attendee just by looking at their nametag.

3. Nametags II. This one is an old standby. Provide additional ribbons that attach to the badge that allow people to list their hidden talents, unknown facts, etc on the ribbon. People can disclose as many facts as they want and your attendees will wander around with a trail of ribbons attached to their nametags.
4. Pseudonyms. Create an alias for your meeting attendees by asking them to list an alternative name on their nametag. Alias can be created by taking the first name of the pet and the last name of their current street. Or use other combinations: First name is your personal hero and the last name is your mother's maiden name. Combine favorite cartoon characters with the last name of a the President they most admire. The possibilities, laughter and surprises are endless.
5. Referrals. Ask people to mingle with someone they don't know with the object of providing each other with 2 referrals of people for business. Each person shares their "elevator" speech about their business and then identifies their ideal customer or a need they have.
6. Consulting Circles. Form two circles of chairs, one inside the other, with equal

number of chairs. The outer circle is composed of people who are willing to share a business problem or situation in which they are interested in advice. The inner circle are people who serve as consultants. The outer circle pose their "situation" to the inner circle and together the two people brainstorm about ideas. After time is up, the inner circle moves one chair to the right and they "consult" with a new person on the outer circle about their issue. Allow sufficient time to actually generate good ideas. The actual time will vary depending upon your group, the issue that are likely to surface, and the time you have allotted to this activity.

7. The Envelope Please. People pose business questions or situations to the group at large by writing the question on a large manilla envelope. All the envelopes are posted around the room and people are encourage to write their ideas and solutions to the issue and place it in the envelope. People can write their name and contact information, as appropriate. When the meeting is over, the person posing the question, collects their envelope and has the opportunity to review many different solutions and perspectives to their issues.

Freebies: Xbox and Networking

FREEBIES: Xbox

Tim Bjarin, on ABCNEWS.com, wrote about an interesting twist to the Microsoft Xbox game system. Microsoft recently introduced an online game connection. Bjarin sees Xbox Live as a potential model for a new type of business network.

With Xbox Live, Microsoft has created a single closed network in which other game developers can place their games online. More importantly for Microsoft though, is the fact that since it controls the network and manages the subscriptions, it ends up virtually owning the customer.

Here's the twist that has broad implications: A \$49 annual network membership fee also supplies you with a headset that lets you actually talk to the people you are playing games with over the Internet in real-time.

Also known as voice over Internet protocols, or VOIP, it allows people to talk to each other via the Internet at a fraction of the cost of making long-distance calls over conventional phone lines.

In essence, what Microsoft has actually created is a communications network for people of like minds to communicate and collaborate via an online application.

Bjarin considers the future -- What if Microsoft could create similar networks around actual corporate applications, charge similar types of subscription fees and in the process deliver a VOIP collaborative environment in which people can talk to each other and work together over this closed network as part of an Internal business process? The process could work for internal collaboration and also using that same VOIP network would allow you to place voice calls to external parties, such as suppliers and customers wherever in the world they might happen to be.

The entire package could offer major cost savings to a company and easily justify the cost of the overall subscription service.

And you thought web meetings were the only technology to watch...

More FREEBIES

If you are interested in more Networking Games, I have several more (like Pick Pocket, Dilemma Boards or Baggage Claim) as an additional Freebie this month. If you would like a copy, please email me at stinnish@ameritech.net or click here [Sue Tinnish](#) I will be slightly unhooked from my network due to vacation and work commitments, but will deliver your freebie in early April if requested.

Future T.I.M.E.

I will be speaking at the following conferences:

MPI-Pittsburgh University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Wednesday, April 14

National Business Travel Association, Orlando, Florida, Wednesday, August 4

For **Independent Meeting Planners**, I will be the speaker during a Brown Bag TeleWorkshop (audio conference) Thursday, November 11, 2004 offered by The Harris Group. Registration will open up soon. The topic is "Adding Muscle to Your Business – Stretching the Meeting and Your Value" and will be based upon a chapter in my book "Meetings with Muscle". Participants will receive a copy of the book as part of the audio seminar.

I was also pleased to be a featured columnist in The Meeting Professional in January and February issues.

Meetings with Muscle is taking shape. This book will focus on increasing the productivity of meetings through better communication strategies. Meetings with Muscle will suggest ideas, strategies, and tips for improving the very core of the meeting -- the content. If you have any contributions or are willing to preview parts of the book, I would love to include you on the team! Please email me and offer your suggestions.

T.I.M.E. Gone By

If you are interested in past issues, please e-mail us with the month and topic and we will send you a copy of that newsletter. Here's what is included in past issues [Back Issue Request](#):

May 2000: **Teambuilding** and (Freebie) New York Times Reprint On Teambuilding

June 2000: **Green Meetings** and (Freebie) Resource List Of Exercises

July 2000: **Values** and (Freebie) Meeting Analysis

August 2000: **Minimum/Minimal Meetings** and (Freebie) Web Winners

October 2000: **Evaluations** and (Freebie) Sample Evaluation Questions

November 2000: **Politics**

December 2000: **Toys** and (Freebie) Brainstorming Ideas

January 2001: [Sales, Award Presentations](#) and (Freebie) Sales Tips
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January 2004: [Branding](#) with (Freebie) Identity vs. Brand

February 2004: **Audio Visual** with (Freebie) Speaker Guidelines

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