



THE STAR THURSDAY 18 May 2006

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It is not what you know or who you know - it is how well you know them that counts.
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Networking: The difference between building and burning

Are you "scorching" the very people you are trying to impress? Find out how not to be the networker with whom no one wants to do business.

IN MY 20-something years of developing business networks and coaching networkers, I have noticed some very different styles of networking. One of these styles results in the ground smoking wherever these networkers tread. I term it "scorched-earth networking".

Let us find out what the hallmarks of a scorched-earth networker are, so you understand how important it is to avoid this type of networking in cultivating a successful business networking model.

A scorched-earth networker...

Moves from networking group to networking group

Constantly dissatisfied with the quality and quantity of referrals that he gets, he does not stay in one place long enough to build the type of relationships it takes to really capitalise on networking.

It is like planting an apple tree in one spot, not being satisfied with the tree's growth after a matter of days, uprooting it and expecting it to grow

faster in another spot. When the growth is not happening fast enough in the new spot, the tree is uprooted yet again and replanted.

Every time that tree is uprooted, it takes longer to build itself back up to where it was before it was moved. A serious networker understands that in order for that tree to grow a bumper crop of apples, it needs to be cared for right where it is.

Talks more than he listens

If you meet someone who talks on and on about his services, what he can provide for you, how he can help you increase your bottom line and so on, but does not seem genuinely interested in your business, what you do and what you need, chances are you have just met a scorched-earth networker.

A serious networker will want to learn all about you, what your professional goals are, and how he can play a part in helping you accomplish those goals.

Does not "honour the event", or networks at inappropriate opportunities

There is something to be said about constantly looking for an opportunity to develop a business relationship, but a serious networker is always aware of how that networking comes across.

You may have seen the scorched-earth networker, for instance, passing out business cards at a church function, funeral or any other inappropriate event. The key to networking at

all times is to do it in a way that is appropriate.

While it can be entirely appropriate to begin a relationship at events such as a wedding or a funeral, going around looking for an opportunity to pass out your business cards is not how it should be done.

Thinks that being highly visible is enough to make business flow his way

The more you are seen in the business community (visibility), the more you become known and trusted (credible).

The problem with the scorched-earth networker is that he seems to think that anything he does that makes him visible is beneficial. But that is just not so.

As people begin to trust you, seeing that you are dependable, honest and outwardly motivated as opposed to selfish and demanding, they then begin to refer you to others. This is when you will see more business referrals coming in (profitability).

Expects others to be consistently referring them

When he is considering developing his social capital, the scorched-earth networker expects that this means finding a source of referrals who is dependable and constant. This is a "get" mentality.

Scorched-earth networkers view networking as a transaction, not a relationship. Serious networkers understand that developing strong social capital means that your focus is on what you can give to your inner

circle.

There is a law of reciprocity and synergy that cannot be denied when you focus on giving referrals to those around you. Think about how you feel when someone refers you to another person. You feel driven to repay the favour.

Scorched-earth networking does not work, because building your business through word-of-mouth is about cultivating relationships with people who get to know you and trust you. People do business with people they have confidence in.

One of the most important things I have learned in the past two decades is this: it is not what you know or who you know - it is how well you know them that counts. If you go into this process understanding this one key point, you will have a better opportunity to build your business through word-of-mouth.

As you network, ask yourself: are you creating relationships by building your social capital - farming, as opposed to hunting - or are you leaving scorched earth and many bodies in your wake? - Source: ST/ANN

■ Article contributed by Dr Ivan Misner, a New York Times best-selling author, and founder and chairman of BNI, the world's largest referral organisation with over 4,100 chapters in 26 countries around the world. Website: www.bni.com.sg

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