



the fear of networking

So who would you most like to meet? Anyone in the world, obviously alive, and it could be for whatever reason. That is the question asked and it is amazing the responses that arise. However given a room of middle managers from a large city institution it is remarkable and at times even surprising how easy it is to get in contact with that person. Big deal. So why is it that this networking opportunity has to be dragged out by a facilitator? The connections are all there they just need wiring up. Stanley Milgram introduced his much maligned concept of 6 degrees of separation many years ago but it always seems to work, that is, if you work at it a little.

For example a young enthusiastic customer relationship manager wants to meet someone of the Richard Branson ilk. The chance is less than slim from his or her perspective. Unless a bit of research is done, so besides the obvious connections where do this influential person's philanthropic interests lie and if we follow just one of these, low and behold it may lead directly back to our very own boardroom. So in less than 2 or 3 small network connections you may well be able to get in touch with the very person who could open doors for you. Whether they want or have the time to speak to you is the next hurdle. Remember though, if you don't try you'll never know.

Network training and development is a highly sought after soft skill in today's busy business world where time is indeed money. As far as teams go you could be a member of several different teams at the same time each of which could have a different lifespan. The sales frontline has been doing network training for years but this style of networking does not suit the workforces whose relationships are virtually entirely internal or inter departmental or perhaps not directly customer facing. It is possible to train these people, even those who have never owned a business card, about the benefits to the business and themselves of sound long term networking.

Mission Performance's 'Working the Room' intervention started from a need to stop those newly recruited high flying graduates from clinging together in a corner like shrinking violets when thrown into the lion's den of a city reception. After all, the investment expended on the reception was not solely so that they could have a fine glass of Chardonnay and catch up on the latest gossip. Improved long term

relationships with increased deal flow or improved efficiency would be a better bottom line.

So is it so difficult to move around a reception where everyone is so much more senior than you, where they all seem to know each other's names and seem to be ensconced in cliques deep in conversation about matters that are of no interest to you. No, it isn't but have we ever trained people how to do it? Largely no. That is where soft skills training comes into it's own. Suppose we could practice remembering names and job descriptions, have a go at breaking into social groups and separating off with someone and taking them over to another group where you again introduce yourself and your new found friend. Suppose you could practice being in an elevator and having the opportunity to get a snap brief across about what makes your company so different from the competition and what benefits you could offer a prospective client.

The fight or flight response and all of the associated body language have much to do with success or lack of it when it comes to communicating. You only have to look at our political icons to see that but there again offices are not without their politics. The power of the eyes is immense; we react subconsciously to someone's pupil response or gaze pattern and will establish a gut reaction based on something we haven't even consciously thought about. The fact that the pupils are virtually the only part of our body that we cannot control is not new knowledge. It wasn't so many years ago that humans used the drug Bella Donna to dilate the pupils to give that innocent and believable Harp seal eye appeal. Most things about the eyes are perceived without us even realising it but oh how powerful the effect can be. That is just the start of body language. When we move onto hands, arms and feet it is remarkable just how much we know about the signs they project but how infrequently we use this knowledge. Just watch the hands of a politician next time you see one speak and see how often he turns his palms uppermost – you know what he means by this so why don't you do it more often?

Building a network takes years. You cannot create one urgently because you need it tomorrow. If you start now and work at it then in say 10 years it could be amazing. The sort of network that is based

on trust is one where anything you do for someone is not for direct gain. If you can help someone genuinely then they are going to get to know and trust you better and eventually when you need help they are more likely to open their doors to you. If they don't then perhaps the timing is not right and if you try again another time in the future then gains might be higher or maybe they are not worth being at the top of your network. Trust is a big part of networking, so often in life there is a tendency to gauge whether we trust someone based on their competency to do the job but in fact our gut feeling based on their character is equally important. How we earn trust is so very important. We all know someone who is so quick to ask for favours before giving and do we like them? If we don't like them then we can never move onto a position of trust and trust is at the heart of a good network.

How can I possibly keep in touch with everyone who gives me a business card? Well a collection of business cards is not a network. A network is small enough that we can make some connection on a regular basis, not just Christmas, and when the reason for calling is just to catch up. If we only call when we need a favour then our contact tends to realise this and act accordingly. This realisation, small as it may be, is just one of the many 'aha' moments that make network training and development so important. Remember that if a racehorse wins by a nose it has still won, likewise in business you only need to be ahead to win the confidence and trust of someone.

At Mission Performance we have taken network training one step further says Richard Tarran one of their facilitators. Not only do we take delegates through a whole series of practical scenarios we also hold a reception with real guests from their own company. Delegates get the opportunity to organise and host the event putting into practice their new soft skills. They also review their success afterwards so that they can continue to improve. In the words of one delegate 'this is the best and most useful course so far!' Richard knows only too well what makes a good and bad event. With years of experience in the Royal Navy hosting cocktail parties at far flung corners of the earth and more recently working for The Royal Family at Buckingham Palace where he was an Equerry. You don't organise a reception and dinner for 650 guests with a concert laid on by a Philharmonic orchestra without learning a trick or two. He recalls his most harrowing test, presenting the Japanese Cabinet by name to a member of the Royal Family!

Knowing how to build a great network extends beyond work and so for employees fills that box 'what's in it for me' when asked to attend another training course. This is something that will benefit them in and out of work and that they can take with them when they move within the industry, after all that is what networks do, they spread out in all directions.

Mission Performance have recently delivered training in Europe, USA, Nigeria, Malaysia, Brazil, the Middle East and know only too well the importance of cultural awareness. That's why their courses cover the multi cultural diversity of networking. The responses to that question, 'So who would you most like to meet?' are so often truly international from Ray Ozzie to Desmond Tutu and guess what, it is normally possible to get to them in less than 6 steps so it's not such a big world after all.

Just remember good networkers positively influence the bottom line but they don't just grow without a bit of nurturing. As a child we are all afraid when we get thrown in at the deep end but with some training in the shallow end that fear subsides and every child has the opportunity and ability to become a world class swimmer with a bit of support and encouragement.

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