

FROM NETWORKING TO TEAM BUILDING: Is Networking Dead?

Article by Herb Rubenstein, President, Sustainable Business Group

Introduction

For years now “networking” has been all the rage. Networking coaches, career counselors and organizational development consultants all espouse the best ways to improve one’s chances of success through networking. In principle, we agree that effective networking is a necessary element in getting a job, expanding a business or non-profit, leading an organization and in making a real difference in one’s quality of life and the quality of life of others.

However, the current literature and networking gurus of today do not seem to emphasize enough that while networking is necessary to aid in success, it is clearly not sufficient. In fact, some days we believe that networking should be pronounced “dead on arrival” and replaced with a much more powerful tool – “teambuilding”.

Networking Explained

Traditional networking includes meeting, greeting and sharing information about yourself, your goals and objectives with an audience that might be in a position to assist you in achieving success, however you define it. Rigorous follow up is one of the key aspects of successful networking. In addition, our experience in the fields of career counseling, organizational development and building businesses and non-profits also shows that one of the key activities in successful networking strategy is “listening”, especially, “active listening”. Listening to others is essential for successful networking.

A stronger form of associating with others can be built using these steps: 1) networking; 2) active listening; and 3) being willing and able to assist those in some traditional way whose assistance you seek in achieving your goals and objectives. We call this stronger form of associating - “teambuilding”.

Toward Teambuilding

Today, informal teams are formed every minute. A team is a group of people (two or more) willing to work together toward achieving some objective. By striving for “teambuilding” rather than mere networking, a person can form more solid, more mutually rewarding relationships than by merely playing the “networking” game.

By striving to become successful at teambuilding rather than networking, a person will automatically take others more seriously, listen more carefully to others, make clearer requests of others, respond more decisively and successfully to the requests of others, and, most importantly, develop a group of people the person can count on in the future.

Teambuilding need not be more time consuming than networking. Whether your goal is to network successfully or “team build” successfully, in either case you need to follow up regularly with people and listen actively to what they have to say. The rewards of active listening can be astounding. Great networkers already know this, but most average networkers do not.

We believe “teambuilding” is a much more rewarding approach than networking in the long run. Several examples will demonstrate. How many networking events have you attended to where you did not know anyone at the beginning of the event and by the end of the event had talked to a few people, exchanged cards and maybe followed up with a phone call, letter or even lunch only to see these “relationships” disappear as fast as the initial hello? And how often did you go to a networking event with the goal of meeting people and while you were successful at meeting lots of people, no successful working (or social/personal) relationship ever resulted from any of those people you met.

When a person enters a room of people or an event with the goal of “teambuilding”, rather than networking, the person knows exactly what kind of team members he or she is looking for, exactly what they need or want from their new team members, and exactly what he or she is willing to do for future team members. With this clarity of mind, the person in the “teambuilding” mode is more careful about selecting the people to meet, is more prepared to create a successful, mutually beneficial relationship quickly, and is more likely not to waste so much time merely meeting people and exchanging cards, letters and maybe breaking bread together once or twice only to see the relationship completely wither without either person doing anything to help the other achieve his or her objectives.

Finally, we believe “teambuilding” is less stressful and more entertaining (personally rewarding) than mere networking. The team builder focuses on a longer time frame than the networker. The team builder needs fewer relationships than the networker to achieve success. The “teambuilder” will be more selective as to which events to attend, come across as more genuine and interesting to others than a networker and will learn more about others through the rigorous practicing of active listening.

Conclusion

For us, and maybe for you, life will seem less frantic in the teambuilding mode than in the networking mode. “Teambuilding” requires a person to become very clear why he or she is building a team. That clarity can make the effort to approach people in a crowded room an especially refreshing journey, especially for the introverted among us. The willingness to become part of another person’s team is a far more “attractive” to others than being willing to be part of their network.

Try your own brand of teambuilding and you may find that networking was only a small part of what you were really looking for in business and social situations. Soon, we believe networking as a “mode of behavior” will die and be replaced with the more meaningful, more rewarding and more satisfying behavior we call “teambuilding.”

About the Author

Herb Rubenstein is the President of Sustainable Business Group, a consulting firm to businesses and governments. The headquarters of the Sustainable Business Group is Denver, Colorado. He is co-author of Breakthrough, Inc. – High Growth Strategies for Entrepreneurial Organizations (Prentice Hall/Financial Times, 1999). He also served as an Adjunct Professor of Strategic Planning George Washington University, and has been an Adjunct Professor of Entrepreneurism at George Mason University and Colorado State University. He has his law degree from Georgetown University, his Master of Public Affairs from the LBJ School of Public Affairs, a graduate degree in sociology from the University of Bristol in Bristol, England and was a Phi Beta Kappa/Omicron Delta Kappa graduate from Washington and Lee University in 1974. His email address is herb@sbizgroup.com and he can be reached at 303 910-7961. For more information about the Sustainable Business Group, see www.sbizgroup.com