

Work an Event, not Just a Room by Lillian D. Bjorseth, President Duoforce Enterprises, Inc.

Networking is the number one reason many people join organizations. When they don't get the results they anticipate, they "blame" the group for not delivering on its promises.

Most organizations provide opportunities for connections to occur rather than making the connections. While organizations need to shoulder the responsibility for offering creative and multiple venues, members also need to take more control of their destiny. They need to learn to network strategically rather than just network. Most people like to step up to the plate when they get to the room (and sometimes strike out!) rather than doing all the preparation involved in a planned approach to this vital art.

Working an event entails knowing what to do beforehand, when you get there and afterwards.

What is Networking?

Networking is an active, dynamic process that links people into mutually beneficial relationships. It is planting seeds. A sale is harvesting. The more fertile the ground in which you plant your seeds, the more likely you are to reap a good crop.

I. What to do Before You Work an Event

a. Create a Plan.

We network for four reasons: Advice, Information, Referrals or Recommendations and Support. Your relationship-building plan helps you focus on what events to attend and why. It also helps you debrief after each event to further focus your efforts.

- i. What is the focus of your business or career?
- ii. What is your main function?
- iii. How does what you do benefit your employer/customers/clients?
- iv. Who is your target market?
- v. Where can you meet them?
- vi. Where can you meet people who can introduce you to them?
- vii. Whom do you want to add to your network?

b. Become a Student of Impression Management.

Lillian D. Bjorseth
2221 Ridgewood Rd.
Lisle, IL 60532

630-983-5308
630-983-5312 (fax)

www.duoforce.com
lillian@duoforce.com

People decide 10 things about you within 10 seconds of seeing you. In today's sound-byte environment, it's probably more like 5-7 seconds. It is based on your image, a combination of appearance and behavior. Every color you wear sends a message. Know what impression you want to create and how to create it. Do you want to say authority, responsibility and knowledge? Then, wear navy blue. Successful? Then wear darker gray. Dependable, practical, stable – brown. Powerful, dignified, sophisticated – black.

Always check out the company's culture and that of the department you would be working for before deciding what to wear for an interview. When I was at Bell Labs, management and engineers had very different dress codes, and it would have been a faux pas not to know that when interviewing.

Keep in mind that a suit jacket with long sleeves, slightly padded shoulders and a collar makes you look one-third more powerful. You can always take the jacket off in an interview. You can never add it if you didn't bring it.

Body language also speaks before you open your mouth. Your posture can bespeak confidence or the lack thereof. Eye contact needs to be steady without being too piercing or too weak - maintain it at least 80 percent of the time. You can look down or away in thought; however, you need to return your gaze to the person's face within seconds. Learn the meaning of different handshakes, and how to react to them.

c. Know Your Relationship-building Strengths and Limitations.

Use a behavioral assessment tool such as DISC to know where you excel in the networking arena and where you need work. Just as importantly, learn to read others so you can network in their style and quickly help them feel comfortable.

If you are naturally confident like the Dauntless style and have a powerful stance, handshake and eye contact, ease up a little, lest you overwhelm others. Indefatigables, curb your natural enthusiasm and desire to do almost all the talking. You'll benefit more from listening more.

Supportive networkers, push your comfort level, and talk with three or four people, rather than just the one who makes you feel safe. And, for those of you with a Careful style, be less stoic and react more. People may think you are aloof, don't care and don't want to be bothered with small talk, and therefore, relationship building in general.

d. Create a Meaningful, Useful Verbal Business Card.

You all know what an elevator speech is. However, you need a front end to that pitch to inform and intrigue people in networking situations.

That's why I created the Verbal Business Card (VBS). It's only a sentence or two. That's all the longer you have to grab someone's attention. It is also the length of time that is proper for you to speak before giving someone else a chance. Your VBS also helps you hone in on your top-of-

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www.duoforce.com
lillian@duoforce.com

the-mind positioning, a must for every professional, as it influences the direction of your marketing efforts.

Your VBS needs to be laden with benefits. People are most interested in how what you do affects or helps them. The VBS focuses on *what* you do, not *how* you do it or *who* you are. Use active verbs, the most powerful words in the English language.

In your generic VBS, don't include your company name (unless it is universally known), your company location, your title, labels such as speaker, trainer and go easy on adjectives and adverbs.

You want your VBS to elicit the question, "How?" That's when you can launch into all the things you are itching to say, i.e. your elevator pitch.

You may need a different VBS for your industry and internal use.

II. How to Work the Event

My 10-Minute Rule for Working a Room breaks down into an introduction, body and conclusion. The *introduction* is for small talk (a misnomer since this lays the foundation for the rest of the conversation) and possible business card exchange. Remember business card etiquette: If you want someone to have your card, ask them for theirs first. If they do not ask you in return, why give them one? Their silence in this area has spoken loudly!

The goal of the *body* is to find a commonality. Have your "ask-for" questions prepared so that you can determine quickly if you wish to pursue building a relationship. Equally important are your "listen-for" answers, again, so you can determine if you wish to move to another level.

The *conclusion* ends the interaction, and for some it is as hard as starting a conversation. Plan endings just as you plan initial words. This helps you politely end one encounter and move on to the next. The person you are speaking with is probably eager to move on, too.

III. What to do After the Event

You will immediately stand out if you do what you promised. This separates those with integrity from those who merely say they will do something.

While there are myriad ways to store your information and follow-up methods, what is most important is that you choose the one(s) that fit the other person's preferences and behavioral (DISC) style. You need to know if it's e-mail, a letter, the telephone or lunch. Know whether to talk about the weather or get right to business, whether to meet in their office or a restaurant. Gauge the right amount of time between contacts and how often to pursue others.

People like to be treated in their style, not yours, and as the sales person (and we all sell all day long!), it is up to you to adapt to each situation.

Happy networking!

Lillian D. Bjorseth
2221 Ridgewood Rd.
Lisle, IL 60532

630-983-5308
630-983-5312 (fax)

www.duoforce.com
lillian@duoforce.com

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Lillian Bjorseth is dubbed a networking expert by the *Chicago Tribune* and the business networking authority by the Association Forum of Chicagoland. Based in Lisle IL, she's a speaker, trainer, skills coach and author who helps you hone your business networking, business development and communication skills. Her published works include *Breakthrough Networking: Building Relationships That Last*, *52 Ways to Break the Ice & Target Your Market* and the *Nothing Happens Until We Communicate* CD and workbook series. She's a contributing author to *Masters of Networking*. Get more information at lillianspeaks@duoforce.com, www.duoforce.com, or 630-983-5308.

Lillian D. Bjorseth
2221 Ridgewood Rd.
Lisle, IL 60532

630-983-5308
630-983-5312 (fax)

www.duoforce.com
lillian@duoforce.com