

Networking Skills

BY DONNA MESSER



Effective networkers have mastered these three essential skills:

Creative visualization; lateral thinking; and artful listening.

When you have mastered these skills, you can network effectively and creatively. In our workshops, we teach these skills and explain their use.

Creative visualization

This is the process of dreaming about your future, and turning the dream into reality by using your own skills, tools, and strategies. You can use this process to help create a wish list, set goals, and find ways to achieve them.

For right-brained people creative visualization and lateral thinking are easy skills to use. Don't typecast yourself in one hemisphere. Let yourself imagine. Making things happen is within your power. When you dream, write down a description of those dreams.

What do you see when you look in the mirror? You don't always see the whole picture. When you visualize with mind's eye you tend to look at the big picture, where there aren't barriers of colour, oceans, or languages. Often a little sign flashes in your head: "You can't do that." The subtle message automatically raises barriers to realizing our visualizations. Refuse to listen to that sort of message. Positive thinking plays a big part in the process. With some effort, you can reject your own negatives.

During this process, ignore all the reasons, financial or personal that will prohibit you from doing something. Eliminate all self-imposed barriers to wishes. "I can't," "but," "if" are not used in this exercise.

There are several steps to the process. Imagining your life path is only part of the exercise. The challenge is to express, in writing, where you really want to go. With the written description of a mental vision, you develop a target, a goal. It is tangible; you can really make it happen. Target some bite-sized achievements that you can accomplish in a specific time frame along the way to the big goal.

Lateral thinking

Lateral thinking is a term developed by Dr. Edward DeBono in 1967 and is now defined in the dictionary as "seeking to solve problems by unorthodox or apparently illogical methods." You can use pictures to move your thoughts to other levels until you come up with an image you can use. In computer lingo, they call it "fuzzy logic" where there are no limits of right/wrong. Lateral thinking stretches your imagination to see a win in every situation.

In life and in business when something happens, try to think of a way to turn it around. How can you turn a negative into a positive?

By listening to what people tell you, you can make connections that result in mutually beneficial business arrangements. Suggesting that two people contact one another may seem a mismatch to those involved because they don't see the common link. Lateral thinkers broaden the possibilities by looking beyond the obvious and leaping to previously never thought of opportunities.

Allow yourself to think in pictures. Images will help you to find new ventures. This is an encompassing process.

Focus on one thing. It could be a business issue that needs a resolution, a product for which you are seeking a market, or a serv-

ice that needs a new market or method of delivery. Close your eyes and think. Words pop into your mind and then the pictures appear and the process goes from there. You build up layers of images. This process of lateral thinking gives us imaginative choices. Using images to spark a thought can make it easier for you to make a connection.

Artful listening

At networking sessions, it is important to use the creative art of listening. You need to be able to hear what fellow networkers are saying, in order to remember the person and the message, and to make connections with and for them. This essential creative skill helps you to encourage speakers and lateral thinkers. **SBCM**

Donna Messer is an international speaker, trainer, facilitator, and author. Founder of ConnectUs International, the company designs, develops and delivers business-training programs. ConnectUs also offers a unique matchmaking service,

which links businesses to opportunities around the world. Donna is also the Managing Editor of BusinessWoman Canada Magazine: www.businesswomancanada.com.



Contact Donna Messer:
dmesser@connectuscanada.com

How to Improve Your Listening Ability

- Concentrate on what is being said, rather than on what you will say when it is your turn.
- Ignore what is going on beside you or outside the window.
- Make your shopping list at some other time, pay attention to the speaker!
- Use body language to let the speaker know that you are attentive. Nod, smile, and make eye contact to let the speaker know that you are listening.
- Show respect for the other's right to speak and be heard. (*i.e. refrain from talking to your neighbour during a presentation*).
- Create an atmosphere that will be safe and caring – a situation where ideas and feelings can be expressed freely.

Hints to Promote Effective Listening

- Avoid distraction; Concentrate;
- Listen for the tone of voice, and what it conveys to you;
- Take notes; Limit your talking;
- Don't jump to conclusions;
- Sit or stand properly (*body language the message you wish to send*);
- React to the ideas professionally, not personally.