



*“Leading the legal industry in Litigation, Diversity,
& Business Development/Social Media Consulting”™*

Using LinkedIn as the “Pre-Game Warm-up” for Your Business Meetings

By: Kevin L. Nichols

(SAN FRANCISCO, February 21, 2012) Retrospectively, I often ask myself, “How did we conduct business without email?” “How did we communicate that there were traffic delays or that we were running late without cell phones?” And more recently, I ask, “How did business people prepare for meetings with top executives or perspective clients before there was LinkedIn?” Never before has there been a time when business people could conduct background research on the individuals whom they intend to meet with without asking them for their curriculum vitae or biographies ahead of time, that is, not until LinkedIn.

You only get one opportunity to make a first impression. Depending on your desired goals, “game time” occurs when you meet face-to-face to achieve the purpose of the engagement. One key factor that is inherently present during a high octane meeting like this is the desire to appear knowledgeable, articulate, charismatic, honest, and trustworthy. To meet this end, it is imperative that you “study the film” on the people who you intend to meet with.

Here are some tips of how you can use LinkedIn to “warm-up” before a big meeting with a potential client:

- 1.) Education – Where the individual went to school can be the spring board for tremendous conversation and talking points. Think about some questions or comments you might share in an unscripted way. If they list the years that they attended the particular school(s) on their profile, do you know someone that went there during that time? What city was it in and have you ever been there? Sharing this information can be a great way to be an “ice breaker” before entering a more substantive topic.
- 2.) Connections – Investigate who you know in common. Knowing who they know can be a great indicator of what kinds of circles that they travel in and maybe an interesting segue into more in depth conversation of their interests. For example, say that both of you share a colleague in common who is an avid golfer and you mention his/her name and their love of the sport. The person who you are meeting with could respond that they played golf with him/her a couple of weekends ago, which leads you to setting up a date for the three of you to play.

- 3.) Work Experience – In addition to looking for commonalities like #1 and #2, analyze their previous work experience to see if you can decipher an underlying theme or passion that the individual has in life. Careful thought and consideration can pay off such that the person will pause that it meant enough to you to even think about such. This is a “game changer” that most people would not feel comfortable taking a stab at.
- 4.) Observations – Note various attributes of their profile, such as how many connections they have (could imply that are an open networker or private and guarded), whether they have any applications linked to their account, such as Tripit or Twitter (shows that they are savvy, risk takers, etc.), or whether they have a picture (communicates that they might be very conservative, shy, down-to-Earth, outgoing, etc.).

Ultimately, there is no full-proof method of achieving your desired outcome for a business meeting. However, using LinkedIn to create useful and sound “talking points” will give you a great place to start your conversation to lead it in the right direction. Remember that this an informal style of communication and only you can judge whether or not the timing is right. It takes someone with enough confidence and “swagger” to finesse such discussions, yet the outcome can determine whether you are fit to play in the Arena League or the National Football League.

Kevin L. Nichols is the Principal of KLN Consulting Group located in San Francisco, which specializes in Litigation, Diversity and Business Development/Social Media consulting. For more information, please visit <http://www.klnconsultinggroup.com>.