

7 REASONS NETWORKING IS DEAD - OR SHOULD BE

I'm not a big fan of 'networking' -that rite of passage for every professional with aspirations of career changes, promotions or new clients. It has its place, of course. But it's not the business development panacea many would make it out to be. In fact, I think networking can do more harm than good in some ways. To make my point, here are 7 ways 'connecting' is better than 'networking'.

NETWORKING IS ABOUT FINDING WAYS TO KNOW MORE PEOPLE.

CONNECTING IS ABOUT FINDING WAYS TO KNOW PEOPLE MORE.

My LinkedIn profile says that I am connected to 1,560 people. That's not right. I am 'networked' with 1,560 people. But I am not 'connected' to them. I can't be. How could I really 'know' that many people? Studies, history, and common sense indicate that the human mind is capable of knowing well only about 150 people. Playing the volume game may serve your ego but it will do little for your happiness, let alone your success. I am 'connected' to about 50 to 75 people who I know really well and through whom almost all of my referrals come. Deep connections build communities of people. 'Communities' are powerful things. They are made up of groups of people who care about each others' success, who trust and respect one another and who exchange favors and assistance. Connecting is about finding the people most qualified for you to help and for them to help you, and building connections with those people. It is about building a self supporting ecosystem in which all boats rise together.

THE OBJECTIVE OF NETWORKING IS TO EXCHANGE INFORMATION.

THE OBJECTIVE OF CONNECTING IS, WELL, TO CONNECT.

At networking camp, we're taught to get a business card, find out about their company and probe for information that can be used later when you follow up. You've probably even been asked to role play how you'll do this. So, networking is about how to get what you want from another person. Networking is very WIIFMⁱ. If you've ever been on the receiving end of this type of interrogation, you know the feeling it creates. And you've made a mental note to avoid this person in the future.

On the other hand, connecting is about how to help each other. Connection requires you to give something, your advice, your thoughts, maybe only your genuine participation in the conversation or a sympathetic ear. In building connections, your focus is on finding ways to help the other person, however trivial that help may be. As such, connecting is very WIIFHⁱⁱ. Instead of figuring out how to distribute yourself across a large volume of people, think about how to contribute yourself among a group of qualified individuals who can themselves contribute to your success. 'Networking' feels much better when you approach the process from the position, how can I make this person feel grateful that they crossed my path? And in doing so you'll create a positive impression more likely to lead to a mental note to schedule lunch with you.

Group Dewey Consulting

NETWORKING PUTS YOU IN UNCOMFORTABLE SITUATIONS.

CONNECTING MAKES SITUATIONS MORE COMFORTABLE.

The executives that I coach hate 'networking' because they think it means going to 'rubber chicken dinners' or stuffy cocktail parties and making nice with strangers. I happen to agree with them. They've been told to 'circulate' and 'work the room' and 'chat people up' like some sort of linguistic lion tamer. Who wouldn't dread that?

Connecting is about finding a person or people who you like and who like you and exploring your mutual interests. Connecting is about being comfortable in a new environment because you are being yourself- not forced to do uncomfortable things. Sure. When you see someone standing by themselves you should go up and introduce yourself. But not because they may be your next big client, but because you would appreciate someone doing so for you. Connecting is about being genuine with yourself and others and then enjoying the trust, respect and compatibility that grows from that.

NETWORKING REQUIRES AN ELEVATOR PITCH.

CONNECTING REQUIRES A DIALOGUE.

Let me ask you a question. Why do you have to prepare (and memorize, mind you) a tweet-long, prepared response to the question 'what do you do for a living'? Is the way you describe what you do, say, to your neighbor so grossly inadequate that you'll cause irreparable harm if you describe it the same way to a business prospect? Do you talk to you neighbor in polished elevator pitch bytes? You don't need to tell people how you save the world. And you're not speed dating. Don't worry about whether or not someone will remember what you do for a living. Worry about how they feel after having talked to you. Don't worry about how polished you come across. Worry about how authentic people think you are. Don't worry about putting yourself in the best light. Shed the best light on the person you are talking with.

NETWORKING IS FOCUSED ON THE FUTURE.

CONNECTING IS FOCUSED ON THE PRESENT.

Watch 'networker-type' people in a networking event. Or better yet, watch their eyes. People who are under the influence of networking will have shifty, distracted eyes. They'll constantly look around the room for the next person to meet. In conversations they'll look away rudely to see if there is someone better to meet. Their nervous energy has them thinking ahead, looking to the next business card fix.

Now look at the connectors. They are engaged and focused. Totally 'present' in the conversation, listening and speaking as if the other person is the only one in the room. It's an enjoyable dialogue and you can tell the two have made a connection. And those connections will generate new opportunities for the connector much quicker than the pollinating flightiness of the networker bee.

NETWORKING IS IMPERFECT.

CONNECTING IS PERFECT.

Group Dewey Consulting

At conferences, organizers often have to bribe people to meet each other with games and drawings. If you meet enough people and prove it by getting their business card, a cartoon stamp of your card or some clue to the game, you'll be rewarded with a chance to win something. Maybe you'll even get a prize- like a yellow smiley face jar opener. Networking is admittedly an imperfect way to grow your business. But it is the most feared way and that's what makes it so much fun for organizers to inflict on their attendees.

Building connections, on the other hand, is perfect. There's really nothing you can do to make it better. You can't force a connection. You can't give it away as a prize. And you can't file away a connection anywhere but in your heart. Making a connection is the prize and everybody wins.

FAILING AT NETWORKING CAUSES MORE DAMAGE THAN FAILING TO CONNECT.

When networking doesn't work, people worry they are doing something wrong. Or worse, that they look foolish. They doubt themselves, curse the process and renew their commitment never to do it again. Networking is unfamiliar territory, often feels awkward and a difficult behavior to master, let alone adjust to. But when people fail to find people that they connect with, they don't view that failure as their fault. In fact, it is quite trivial. That may be because people have been connecting with other people since their first breath of air. No matter how introverted you are, no matter how secluded your existence has been, you know how to connect when you meet someone you like. Making a connection produces a sense of euphoria. For most people, though, the idea of 'networking' produces a feeling far different.

No. Networking is dead. It's been dead a long time. Thank goodness all I've ever really needed to be successful were my connections.

ABOUT GROUP DEWEY CONSULTING

Group Dewey Consulting, LLC provides growth consulting and training services to law firms, practice groups and lawyers. Our core expertise is in business development coaching and training, marketing, lateral candidate due diligence, practice group management and strategy. We base our services on simple, sensible techniques and principles to overcome the complexities of a dynamic marketplace.



Eric Dewey, MBA is Managing Principal of Group Dewey Consulting, and has over 25 years of marketing and business development experience in four industries including chief marketing executive and practice administration roles at two AmLaw firms and the largest plaintiff's securities class action firm in the United States. He holds an MBA and two marketing certifications and writes the blog, [Lawyer Up!](#) He can be reached at eric@groupdeweyconsulting.com or 502-693-4731.

ⁱ WIIFM = What's In It For Me

ⁱⁱ WIIFH = What In It For Him / Her