

The Business Connector

A Quarterly Newsletter from AmSpirit™ Business Connections

Do You Just Belong?

Spring 2001 Vol. 3 No. 1

We have all been there. In an effort to bolster our high school or collegiate transcripts, we embarked on a mission to belong to as many clubs and organizations as we could – the science club, cross country team, and student council, to name just a few.

This can certainly be a reasonably successful strategy for getting into college. And it can be of great assistance in landing that first job. After all, coupled with our decent grades, this listing of extracurricular activities makes us appear well rounded.

But simply belonging to a litany of organizations is of limited value once we are out of school and in the real world. The problem is that "just belonging" is not very effective for developing a productive network.

The foundation upon which a productive network is built is a mutual knowing, liking and trusting. Here, a productive network requires developing solid relationships, which cannot be achieved through the loose affiliation associated with "just belonging."

To make our memberships meaningful networking experiences, we need to avoid having a broad array of affiliations with limited involvement. In exchange, we need to limit our affiliations and become more involved. In other words, time constraints dictate that we need to get more involved with fewer organizations.

There are no hard and fast rules regarding the appropriate number of organizations in which we should involve ourselves.

The general rule is to belong to only as many organizations as we can provide sufficient involvement to make our time worthwhile.

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What clubs and organizations we choose to be involved in is a professional decision, personal to each of us. In other words, it will depend for each of us on a variety of issues, not limited to our own beliefs and convictions, the industry in which we are involved, our product or service, where we live, where we work and our goals. In short, an organization in which we join should be one in which we are interested enough to have a sufficient involvement.

This certainly begs the question, what constitutes sufficient involvement? There are as many levels of involvement as there are organizations with which to be involved. Certainly on the one extreme, being involved could constitute being a creator or founder of a club or organization.

Although perhaps not as ambitious, our involvement could come in the form of serving as an officer, committee chair or board member of an organization or club. If that is our choice of involvement, we need to choose the position that best

complements our talents and allow us to fulfill our obligations to the best of our abilities.

Sufficient involvement, however, does not require something as formal as being a founder or being in a leadership position. We can become sufficiently involved by simply assisting with the completion of a project or making a significant contribution to a discussion. In fact, involvement could be as simple as being around and mingling before and after the meeting.

Whatever the choice of involvement, the test of sufficiency is simple. We need to ask ourselves, with respect to the club or organizations to which we belong, if we were not at its meeting or event, would we be missed? If our answer is yes, our involvement is sufficient. If no, we simply need to become more involved.

What is so special about being involved? When we become involved with the clubs and organizations to which we belong, we transform ourselves. When we become involved, we are no longer merely just a name on a roster, but a face, a handshake and a smile with whom people can become familiar.

When we become involved, soon our familiar face and smile is not just another face in the organization. We become a person with common cares, concerns and goals.

When we become involved, others have the opportunity to know, like and trust us. From here it is inevitable that our network becomes more productive.▼