

The Business Connector

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The Golden Rule of Networking

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What is a network? It is a group of people cooperating to benefit one another. Why do we network? Our networks present us with opportunities, information, support, and energy as well as additional contacts.

How do we improve the flow of these benefits? Simple. Provide these benefits to individuals in your network first. Yes, although counterintuitive, the *Golden Rule of Networking* is "Give First; Get Second."

Donna Fisher, in her book *People Power* (1995 Bard & Stephen), refers to this as the "Boomerang Effect." According to Fisher, taking the initiative to give, participate and offer support to your network is similar to throwing a boomerang. Eventually what you inject into your network – opportunities, information, support, energy and additional contacts – comes back to you.

Why does the "boomerang effect" work? Remember the last time someone did you a favor. Perhaps they gave a lead on a new employee or produced unique information related to your industry. Whatever the favor, you certainly said, "thank you" and maybe even sent a gift basket.

Despite these gestures of gratitude, you probably still felt an underlying sense of obligation. This is because most people have a difficult time receiving and not giving back. It is this human nature that serves to provide the drive that returns the "boomerang" to the giver.

Consider Attorney Greg Hickman: After hearing that drugstore chain REVCO was being acquired by rival CVS, he realized that a friend would likely be terminated in the merger. He called his friend and confirmed his suspicions.

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Greg initiated action. He gathered information from his friend. Then, tapping into his network, he contacted an executive recruiter whom he met a few months earlier and shared the information about his friend.

Within hours the recruiter had contacted his friend. Later that week Greg's friend had an interview for a new position. Two weeks later, his friend had an offer. In fact, the new position was substantially better than the one from which he was to be terminated.

What has Greg done? He contributed to his network. He provided his friend with a new contact – an executive recruiter. And he introduced the executive recruiter to an opportunity – a chance to place his friend.

What did these efforts yield? Shortly after starting the new position, his friend referred a client to Greg. Additionally, within a year the executive recruiter also sent a new client to him. A remarkable return for a couple of telephone calls.

When can we expect the return of our "boomerangs"? We cannot predict when they will return. Sometimes it occurs immediately. Sometimes we wait days, other times weeks, and still other times we can wait years.

Because we cannot predict their return, we should not expect it. We just need to trust that what we give out will come back.

Consider the case of Mexico as documented by Robert Cialdini, Ph.D. in his book *Instant Influence* (1995 Dartnell). In 1990, after Mexico City suffered a disastrous earthquake, the government of Mexico received a \$5,000 contribution from Ethiopia.

This was puzzling to Cialdini. After all, at this same time, Ethiopia was in the midst of a terrible famine. On a daily basis its people were literally dying by the hundreds. Why would Ethiopia not keep the \$5,000 for use with its own people?

When asked this same question, the Ethiopian Relief Agency simply responded, "In 1935, when Italy invaded, Mexico *helped* us."

In this case, Mexico could not have predicted when it would need a return of support. Therefore, it would have been senseless to expect it. Ethiopia's return of support over 50 years later simply serves as confirmation that if we give and trust in the *Golden Rule of Networking*, opportunities, information, support, energy and additional contacts will come back to us from our network.

Next time you are disappointed with what your network is providing, examine what you have been contributing to it. Chances are if you toss a "boomerang" or two, you will revitalize the flow of your network. ▼