

The Business Connector

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Stone Soup For The Network

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A metaphor – not to be confused with parody or satire – is a statement containing an implied comparison.

They are all around us. They are simple statements such as *the entire World is a stage*, or *the curtain of night* or *the storm of protest* or many more just like them.

Beyond simple statements, entire stories have served as metaphors. Consider George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Orwell used an allegorical farm to illustrate the many similarities between the communist government and the previous czarist regimes in old Russia.

Or consider Lewis Carroll's *Alice In Wonderland*. Through metaphors of children's games and rhymes, Alice learns that rules are vital to civil, adult life.

Or consider *The Story of Stone Soup*. This tale of a peddler's efforts to get a village to share its food is a metaphor for how simple acts of generosity can inspire a network to become productive.

Well maybe not. Maybe Marcia Brown did not intend for her story to serve as a metaphor, at least not one related to networking. Nonetheless, *Stone Soup* should be an inspiration for our networking.

This tale is set somewhere in Eastern Europe, in a village that is enduring a great famine. Here the villagers hoarded whatever food they could find – hiding it from even their friends and neighbors.

One day a peddler drove his wagon into the village. The villagers, not interested in feeding the stranger, encouraged the

peddler to move on, "We have nothing here for you – go to the next town."

Nonetheless, *Stone Soup* should be an inspiration for our networking.

The peddler, however, proclaimed that he was not looking for anything from the villagers, but rather, he wanted to share with everyone some stone soup.

With a growing crowd of villagers watching, the peddler filled an iron cauldron with water and built a fire under it. Then he ceremoniously drew an ordinary stone from a velvet bag and placed it in the water.

As the stone broth simmered, the peddler moved the villagers to share their small, but hidden stockpiles of food. "Of course, stone soup with cabbage – that is hard to beat." Inspired to contribute, a villager retrieved a hidden head of cabbage and placed it in the soup.

"Stone soup a bit of salt beef, why that is fit for a king." Almost immediately, the village butcher eagerly produced some. And on it went through potatoes, onions, carrots and so on, until everyone had shared. Before long, the stone soup was a delicious meal for all.

A network develops much the same way. At first everyone holds back, hesitant to contribute. The trust of one another is lacking. The situation is awkward, confused and off balance. Then one day someone does something. This something may need

to be a little more than simply placing a rock in some water, but it does not have to be anything monumental either.

Perhaps this someone goes out of his or her way to make an introduction. Or perhaps this someone provides small but meaningful information to others. Or perhaps this someone refers some business to someone else.

The substance of the act does not matter. What does matter, however, is that this act is made. This simple act of generosity then becomes contagious.

One small act leads to another. And then another. Then the small acts start to grow in stature. Soon, everyone is involved in a frenzy of networking – all this from one small act.

Our *networks can and will catch fire* from one small act made by someone, literally anyone. Which begs the question, why should we wait for someone else to provide this catalyst?

The answer is obvious – we should strive to be more like the peddler in *Stone Soup*. We need to go out of our way to find opportunities to help others, whether that is making introductions, sharing information, or giving referrals.

It is these acts, while inconsequential on their own, that are the little somethings that will inspire those around us to follow our lead and become more generous.

Stone Soup may not have been intended as a metaphor for networking, but if we take a lesson from it our *network will become rock solid* – metaphorically speaking, of course. ✓