

The Business Connector

A Quarterly Newsletter from AmSpirit™ Business Connections

Networking: Alive & Well

Fall 2005 Vol. 7 No. 3

A couple hundred-thousand years ago, early *Homo sapiens* had evolved enough to descend from the trees, walk upright and venture forth. Then in a mere tick of the geological clock, humans had literally populated every nook and cranny of planet Earth.

How did this occur? Humans discovered that they not only improved their chances of survival, but also increased their level of prosperity, by simply sharing labor, tools, and information. This is networking in its earliest form.

It did not stop there, however. Networking has guided the human race and examples of it litter our history. For example, born into a family resolutely against the war, Betsy Ross' marriage to a man in another religion provided a connection to George Washington at church service each week.

Or, consider the impact networking had on Francis Scott Key. As an American citizen neither involved in the military nor politics, it was the contacts that Key had in government, combined with a tenuous relationship to a captured elderly American doctor, which put him in position to be inspired by Britain's failed attack on Fort McHenry.

Over time, our need to advance ourselves and prosper has remained constant. We continually seek to build and grow who we are, what we have and what we know.

Over time, however, much has changed. Technology is advancing on a daily basis and business is changing in an attempt to

keep pace. As a result, our society is more transient and far-flung.

We frequently move, making it common for us to live and work in communities with strangers we call neighbors. We simply do not enjoy the same deep-rooted community ties that existed 50 years ago.

We still have this drive to satisfy our need to prosper, but the business landscape is simply not the same as when our parents started. Our time constraints tempt us to forego face-to-face conversations and send cryptic e-mails to someone in the next cubicle.

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Has life evolved to a point where networking has seen its day in creating success? Don't bet on it. Networking – the process of helping those around us while at the same time seeking their assistance – is alive and well.

While the changes of the last century may have altered the manner in which we network, it is still the primary driver of business success and career advancement.

Networking lives. The evidence is all around us. It was not luck that allowed a young Cable News Network (CNN) to keep its correspondents in Iraq during the start of the 1991 Gulf War. It was the relationships that Ted

Turner had forged with Middle Eastern news affiliates well before all other western broadcast networks were ordered to leave the country.

It was not divine intervention that allowed a high school dropout to create one of the country's largest hamburger chains. R. David Thomas networked for years through the contacts he had made while working at Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Networking works, even though societal changes and technological advancements seem to challenge its viability. But there is good news. We have an advantage over early humans, Betsy Ross or Francis Scott Key. Today, organizations abound to assist us in getting networked, such as local chamber, trade and professional associations, and structured networking organizations.

Yes, a growing business or advancing career will always require hard work and offering value. But hard work and value alone will never create success. Success also demands that we have an active and diverse network in place. It is through our networking that we are introduced to key contacts, strategic partners, and groundbreaking information. These things catapult our hard work and value toward success.

As time passes, we can be certain that what we labor over will change. We know that technology will serve to advance the tools we use. And the information we share will do nothing but get more complex. The means to our prosperity will remain the same, however. Networking. It is alive and well. ▼

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