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The Power Of Networking

By Sharif Khan

"If you don't network, you don't get work." – Unknown

How powerful is your network? What would happen if you got fired today? What would happen if you had to fold your business and declare bankruptcy? What would happen if a loved one needed emergency medical surgery not covered by insurance and it was a matter of life and death? How many people in your network would be able to really help you out when the going gets tough? Would you be able to pick up the phone, call up one of your contacts, and get a decent job referral or have them lend you some money to tie you over?

This might sound like too serious and morbid a topic to even think about during the holiday season, but let's face it - many employers wait until after the holidays to break the bad news, and many businesses fold after a bad holiday shopping season. So if you haven't asked yourself this question, now is a good time to ask and honestly answer the question.

Do you think that someone you haven't called in months, maybe years, is going to open up their wallet or rolodex and help you out of the kindness of their heart. Maybe. And that's a BIG maybe. But in all likelihood, I think not. In fact, it would be insulting to the person and demeaning to you, that you never bothered to stay in touch, and are only calling to hit them up for some money. In some cases, people do have the financial and/or human resources to help out but it's more likely they will help out someone they know and trust over a stranger.

Networking is not about handing out and collecting business cards. It's about developing relationships. It's about picking up the phone and calling people and staying in touch with them. Do something nice for someone in your network. Refer them a lead for their business. Offer to help them out on a project or to lend a helping hand if they're moving. They'll remember you for it.

Stay in touch! And for heaven's sake, if someone gives YOU a lead, follow up right away!! Life is too short and fragile. I remember getting a good lead from someone in regards to contacting the legendary Canadian author, Pierre Berton, who wrote 50 books in 50 years, and won three Governor-General's Awards and 14 honorary degrees. I kept putting it off, and putting it off, thinking I had all the time in the world, and eventually the lead got filed away somewhere and I forgot about it. Mr. Berton died recently

The Power Of Networking

at the age of 84 at Sunnybrook hospital in Toronto of complications from diabetes and heart disease. Canada is at a loss. I most certainly am at a loss.

Sharif Khan (

<http://www.herosoul.com>;

sharif@herosoul.com

) is a copywriter and communications

specialist, inspirational keynote speaker, and author of the leadership bestseller, "Psychology of the Hero Soul." He publishes his monthly Hero Soul ezine for cutting-edge advice on personal growth.

Three Key Networking Principles for Women Professionals

By Michelle Goodwine

In order to break through the glass ceiling and reach gender equity, there are several key strategies that women professionals must adopt. One such strategy is networking.

There is no doubt that women, like men, need others' help to achieve our goals. Very few of us have gotten where we are in our careers without someone's assistance. Honestly we must admit that we may have been hired for a job because of whom we knew. And for us women entrepreneurs, much of the business we receive is through our personal contacts.

Networking Defined

So what is networking? According to "The Networking Book" by Jessica Lipnack and Jeffrey Stamps, "Networking is people connecting with people, linking ideas and resources." The book "Power Networking, 55 Secrets for Personal & Professional Success" states that networking is not: 1) Selling; 2) Using people for your gain; 3) Coercing or manipulating someone to do what you want; 4) Putting friends, neighbors, associates on the spot; or 5) Badgering people about your business.

Three Key Networking Principles

Based on these definitions, what should women professionals keep in mind when networking? The following three principles should guide every woman's networking approach:

1. Establish Relationships with Network

When trying to "connect" with people, try to find areas of common interest -issues, ideas or activities that you share in common with the other person. Effective networking is not a "one-shot" deal. True networking requires establishing a long-term relationship with someone. And the best way to do that is to find out about that individual on a personal and business level.

2. Be Honest about Your Intentions

State why you are contacting an individual for help. Do not say you would like to conduct an informal interview if you are actually trying to get a job offer from the meeting rather than information. Your honesty will result in people be more willing to assist you.

3. Reciprocate

Networking is a two way street. So if someone has assisted you, make it a priority to help her down the road. However, do not expect something for someone just because you did something for her. Sometimes that person may not be in the position to help you. However, personally I believe that if you help someone out of the goodness of your heart, it is the "order of the universe" that someone will help you one day. And remember, it has been said, that it is better to give than to receive.

These three key principles have one common element - treating people with respect. By applying these principles, we can enrich our lives professionally and personally.

Michelle Goodwine is President and Founder of Integrated HR Strategies, the only African–American, woman–owned strategic human resources consulting firm in the country. For more information about her company's services, visit

www.integratedhrstrategies.com

. Visit Michelle's website at

www.michellegoodwine.net for information about her professional speaking experience or e–mail her at michelle@michellegoodwine.net. Copyright © 2004 Integrated HR Strategies. All Rights Reserved.

michelle@michellegoodwine.net

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