

Face to Face Networking: Still the Best Way to Start Business Relationships

by Lillian D. Bjorseth

While the much vaunted online social media may be valuable tools, there's simply no substitute for face-to-face communication in cultivating new relationships, particularly the first contact

"Men, you are marksmen – don't any of you fire until you see the whites of their eyes." Those oft-repeated words from Gen. Israel Putnam were spoken while he was commanding the Revolutionary Army at the Battle of Bunker Hill. Every year as we celebrate the birth of the United States of America, I remind people that the best relationships are also begun when you see the whites of someone's eyes.

Lest I be misunderstood in this age of online networking (I won't call it online social networking because face-to-face is definitely social, too!), I want to share immediately that I believe both methods are important and compatible.

Face-to-face took a beating for a while as people clamored to become part of the now generation. In fact, one person I asked to do a testimonial for the new third edition of *Breakthrough Networking: Building Relationships That Last* said, "Sure, even though you talk mostly about old-fashioned networking." I sought other testimonials! Ironically, though, I had a call from her recently sharing how she's in transition, and her inanimate computer isn't supporting her like real people. Duh!

My increasing requests for speaking engagements on face-to-face techniques lead me to believe people again realize the value of this form of networking to increase sales, find a job and build solid relationships that last. It is the safest, most effective and preferred way to begin accumulating the kind of wealth you need throughout your life: social capital, i.e., a large network of knob turners to open doors to whatever you are seeking.

I'm going to ballyhoo face-to-face as the preferred initial contact. It deserves equal time! These are the reasons:

Live interaction

About 90 percent of in-person communication is conveyed through nonverbal actions. Your walk, posture, handshake, eye contact, facial expressions and appearance as well as your tone, rate, pitch, speed and inflection share volumes with those who are astute people readers. This form of communication is missing online. The words account for about 10 percent.

If someone you want to meet is geographically inaccessible, the second best thing is to spend time with her/him on the telephone because you can engage the person in an

interactive conversation to hear voice modularity and get a quick feel for her/his communication style and business savvy.

Knowledge and trust factors

You do business with people you know and trust or people referred by people you know and trust. Both ingredients are established more quickly when you meet face-to-face.

Would you rather do business with someone your associate refers after meeting her/him in person ... or online? It's difficult to engender trust based on your LinkedIn profile alone. (Who monitors that the information is factual?) The profile, however, can be a great way to enhance information you already received.

Honesty and integrity

You can see that people are who they say they are and how they portray themselves. You also gain valuable information by listening and observing.

Immediacy of decision-making

One of the early decisions you need to make is whether it is worth pursuing a mutually beneficial relationship. It is far easier to do in person as you share your "ask for" questions and measure responses against your "listen for" answers.

Ask-for questions help you determine if the person is a first-degree candidate to help you grow your business or further your career or a second-degree candidate because s/he knows someone who can help you. "Listen-for" answers contain the information that alerts you the person has relationship potential because s/he plays in your ballpark ... or not.

Memorability

People remember you much more easily when they have met you in person. An online photo or video is helpful; however, it's not like looking you in the eye and shaking your hand. You need to ensure your personal encounters are meaningful so that you gain top-of-mind positioning in your subject area.

Increased online contacts

Increased personal contacts will also help you increase your online contacts on sites like LinkedIn since most of you link only with people you know. You become more valuable as the size and quality of your network grows.

Once you have invested time and effort into face-to-face meetings, you can rely on online networking to stay in touch and strengthen your relationships. That's where the two methods fit hand-in-glove.

May your relationships burst into sparkling successes!