

BUILDING YOUR NETWORK

I have chosen to adopt a symbol of communication to help me building my network.

In this New Year I have come across the “INUKSHUK” story twice, never having heard it before. It is a beautiful story that should be heard more in today’s busy, ever changing world. The story of the Inukshuk led me to a thought process about communication and networking, and how we can better our skills in that area.

We can be strong as individuals, but by coming together our strengths and abilities allow us to achieve greater success.

Briefly the story of the Inukshuk is:

That stone monuments are erected in the image of humans. One of the purposes was to communicate direction, and as such they were a tool for survival, and symbolic of the unselfish acts of a nomadic people – the Inuit, who built them as signposts to make the way easier and safer for those who followed

The hands of many and the efforts of an entire group were required to build these massive stone sculptures. They are a result of a consensus of purpose, of focused action by a group united in its goal and labour. The Inukshuk are the product of co-operation, teaching us that as good as our individual efforts may be, together we can do even greater things.

Each stone is a separate entity. Each supports, and is supported by, the one above and the one below. No one piece is any more or less important than the other. Its strength lies in its unity. Its significance comes from its meaning as a whole. What is true about the Inukshuk is true about people. Each individual entity alone has significance. As part of a team each of us supports, and is supported by, another. We are united by our common goals, and together we are part of a greater whole. Today, the Inukshuk are a tangible symbol of communication – a universal means of speaking about our concerns for one another and our dependence on one another.”

So when I think about networking, I think about the Inukshuk and how people who network come together with a common goal, to build relationships, support each other, and help each other move forward.

Building Your Network

Networking consists of the 4 **W**'s these are:

- What
- Where
- When
- Who

What is networking? Networking can have many different meanings.

To develop a broad list of contacts -- people you've met through various social and business functions -- and encouraging them assist you in looking for a job. People in your network may be able to give you job leads, offer you advice and information about a particular company or industry, and introduce you to others so that you can expand your network.

Networking is relationship building, once the relationship of trust and reputation has been established a bridge has been built. This bridge is continually being built over time, until your network contacts feel secure enough to know that you live up to your reputation.

Reputation is something that does not happen overnight, once again this is built, bit by bit, letting people know you can be counted on to do a good job, a professional job, not let your customer/clients down. Word of mouth referrals are the foundation of your network, this means once your reputation has grown sufficient enough for people to pass on referrals to you, and your bridge has a strong foundation on which to rest.

Networking is a continuous cycle that never stops; networking should become a habit, the same as brushing your teeth when you wake up each morning, or replying to your emails every day. Once the habit of networking has been established you will find that networking becomes part of your life and instead of it feeling like a chore, you begin to enjoy it.

Where should you Network?

Everyone has a choice where to network, a short list of my networking choices would be:

- The Internet
- Networking Groups
- Local Neighbourhood
- Family Events
- Social Events
- Charity Events
- In the local Mall when shopping
- Hairdressers
- Doctors Office
- Dentist Office
- Schools
- Local TV community channels
- Trains/Buses

I find that, without actually working at it, I network anywhere and everywhere. It is part of my routine now that I do without even realising it. I talk about Motivational Steps everywhere I go, there is always an opportunity to talk about my business.

Each person will have a preference where they feel comfortable networking. Some people hate the social gatherings where business is discussed. Others may dislike network groups such as ours and feel a pressure to offer referrals. Once you have found your comfort zone you have to make sure networking is fun, productive and reaps rewards over time.

When to Network

Once again this is an individuals personal preference, unless you are like me, I just love to network all the time, wherever I am, whatever I am doing.

Depending on what business you own/work in may decide on the choices of when you can network.

If you work in a retail environment you may work shifts so some weeks you will be free to network in the mornings, and other weeks you may only be able to network evenings.

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If you can decide on your work hours there are lots of opportunities out there to network 24/7 if you so wish! Personally I have explored most of the networking opportunities out there and I prefer not to network to lunch at an organized network event. I find I pay for the meal and cannot eat and talk at the same time. So if I want to talk about my business I cannot eat the meal I paid for and end up with a grumbling tummy that can be very noisy! On the other hand if I am invited out to lunch and it is an informal network meeting then I feel less pressured and can manage to at least eat a little bit of my lunch.

There are breakfast networking opportunities that may fit in with your lifestyle better than lunchtime ones. After 5 network meetings work well, just after lunch but before supper. But once again at some of these after 5 networking events there are nibbles on hand and drinks. My advice would be to eat before you network, if at all possible. This leaves you free of plates, glasses, cups etc – you can shake hands with ease with people you meet, reach your business cards easily, without having to find a place to put your food down somewhere. Also this avoids the hungry, grumbly tummy talking to your network contact, rather than yourself.

I have discovered some really fun network groups where you pay a small amount of money at the door and you get to drink wine and eat nibbles. I have to be careful only to drink a couple of glasses of wine, because I am very intolerant to alcohol and still find that I am unable to eat the nibbles and network comfortably with my mouth full. These network groups are normally in the evening, which may fit in better with some peoples schedule.

I offer my services to the local community TV channels as often as possible; this is a form of networking that reaches a bigger audience. Community channels are for everyone's benefit, so if you have a business you want to promote contact the local cable TV station and they are always happy to invite you along.

Writing articles is another way to network, if your article gets printed many people get to read that article and find out a little bit about you and your business.

Who to Network With

Once again this is for the individual to decide whom they feel comfortable working with. But if you remember my list of networking “where’s” you can see I network with everyone who wants to listen to me.

On the other hand some people may prefer not to network at events such as an “ All Women’s Network Group”. Obviously this would only apply to women, going by the name. Some women may think that only networking with other women business people that this may limit their productivity, or referrals in some way. My future husband decided not long ago ever again to network with a group consisting of guys who were all computer geeks. The reason for this being they do not talk to anyone, they just geek, which kind of inhibits the whole reason you are there in the first place.

Building Your Network

Who you network with has to be a choice you make based on your personality, your lifestyle, and your business even. For instance, if you have a haulage company and you were invited to a networking group called the “Hairdressers of Tri-City Region” I doubt you would be interested in attending.

On the other hand you should not think of networking as just a means to sell your product or service. Using me as an example, I may meet a butcher at a networking event; this guy owns a small shop and only has one employee. He is not interested in me selling him a motivational presentation. This does not mean that he will go away and forget about me, he may well know some people in bigger organizations who do hire motivational speakers. One day this butcher may be talking with one of these business friends and they might mention they are looking for a motivational speaker and the butcher remembers me.

My advice would be to network with everyone, promote your business everywhere you go however you feel comfortable doing it.

The key to successful networking is deciding to put the energy needed to make it work. First, you need to get organized (for example, keeping a business card file or computer database). Second, you need to stay in contact (for example, through regular phone calls, email, and holiday greetings). Third, you need to set goals for yourself (such as 5 new contacts per week). Make sure you have business cards to give out to people who you think you want to keep in contact with.

“I believe networking is as easy as drinking a cup of coffee and as difficult as we want to make it. Networking can be fun, and done anywhere. Building bridges to relationships is the key to successful networking.”