

It's a Numbers Game

If you are married or in a special relationship, do you recall the circumstances under which you met your significant other? Were you looking for them? Whenever I ask anyone that question, a smirk or a knowing smile spreads across his or her face. Most of us don't meet that special someone in a singles bar, we find her or him when we least expect it. For example, my wife and I met while working for the same company. Ironically, we attended the same high school many years previously, she was one year behind me, and dated my cousin, whom I saw nearly every day. Yet in a sea of some two thousand faces, we never saw each other. Timing is everything in this life and oftentimes we can't control when things will happen, but if we form certain behavior patterns, we can ensure that some things will happen, sooner or later.

Many years ago, I read an article stating that to find one diamond capable of being cut to one carat, top white, D grade or better flawless quality, one had to dig through two and a half tons of rock and lesser quality diamonds. I have frequently compared myself to a diamond miner over the years, since I dig through many lesser candidates to help clients find the real gems. Rarely am I lucky enough to find them after my first few "shovels full". You on the other hand will have to dig through a pile of poor leads, arrogant recruiters, the Internet boards and vague job descriptions to find that gem which will take your career to its next level. You may have to turn over one thousand or more "shovels full", but the sooner you get this work done, the faster you can get on with your career and your life. What is your sense of urgency?

One common issue is challenging each of our chapter chairs, and that is poor attendance by Active Members at chapter meetings. For example, approximately one hundred twenty or more members live within driving distance of the Stamford, CT meeting location, but only fifteen attended our last meeting. Our speaker, Mercer Field, is an executive coach. For two hours, she explained the potential fatal errors and pitfalls that can derail someone early in a new job. Given the short turnover of CIO's, I would say that this was a highly valuable meeting that should have been better attended. Most of our small group took notes or asked many questions. As I drove away thirty minutes after the meeting ended, at least half the members were still talking with Mercer in the parking lot. They may owe her a big debt of gratitude if they are more successful in their next positions.

I know that many of us have personal commitments, job interviews, other meetings and a few occasional consulting assignments, which may conflict with TENG meeting schedules, but I am concerned that the inertia created by personal stress may be causing some of you to sit back when you should be charging ahead. As an Active Member, it can be very tiring attending the countless networking events, career fairs, SIM meetings and the like. The constant repetition of sharing your present circumstances with others can be mind numbing and builds on any feelings of inadequacy, failure and embarrassment that you may already have. Add to that all of the rejection you receive and your search is burdensome at best. On the other hand, you won't find your next job sitting home and waiting for the world to come to you. You need to have "face time" with many others on a constant, ongoing basis until you land. As Mercer Field commented at our last meeting, if you want to consider multiple job offers, you need to have at least ten personal meetings per week, every week. Most of them will not be interviews, but they should

be with people who are either colleagues or who can offer leads and referrals to others, with whom you can continue the networking and meeting process.

If you are presently in transition, your full time job is networking and getting your message out to as many people as possible. You should not have to walk down a city street or stand in a shopping center parking lot wearing a sandwich board with your resume painted on it. On the other hand, making others aware of your situation in casual conversation may reap huge rewards, since nearly everyone likes to help someone else. A few years ago, a local IT executive lost his position when his company reorganized. While walking out of church the following Sunday, he was speaking with some fellow parishioners and mentioned his new career search. Someone nearby overheard him and pulled him aside. This other parishioner's company was searching for a new IT Director. An introduction was made and the unemployed executive joined this other company a few weeks later. Will this happen to everyone? No, this is an unusual coincidence, but it illustrates what can happen when you get the word out.

What are the benefits of meeting others in person?

- The most obvious is the visual, since we absorb most of our sensory experience through our eyes. People now have a face to place with a name and background. They know you as a multi-dimensional person, rather than as a resume or voice on the phone.
- Physical presence adds urgency and commitment. It is not as easy to walk away from you without helping, as it is to hang up a telephone. Eye contact, sincerity, determination and chemistry may cause your conversation partner to think a little harder and share names that may have been overlooked in their desire to end a phone conversation.
- Personal meetings allow for more interaction. All parties become better acquainted, which facilitates the gaining of more "business intelligence", i.e. company information, hiring trends, valuable contacts, sharing of experience. A personal conversation may lead to brainstorming and spark new ideas. Email and phone calls simply do not allow for the same depth that can be achieved in a personal meeting.
- The job market is very slowly improving. People are being hired, but at a slow pace. In order to "ride the wave" as it improves, you have to get wet.
- The Internet and Email may be making us lazy. I feel that Email encourages us to wait for things to come to us, rather than go after them. Going through the effort to meet others is proactive, places us in charge of something constructive and can be potentially rewarding through new lifelong relationships.

What actions should you take?

- Network with as many people as possible on a continuing basis. Don't stop until you receive an offer that you accept. After you have accepted a new position, maintain your network, stay in touch with everyone in it and continue to nurture it.

- Keep notes from conversations. Build a database of names of those with whom you want to make a permanent part of your network.
- Search out career networking events within your geographical area. Anything within a two hour drive should be fair game. You can search on line and go to a library and peruse regional newspapers, magazines and trade journals. Sometimes networking events are advertised in the local media. For example, in New York City, WCBS News Radio periodically announces such events in its business report. Most radio and television stations, as well as newspapers have Web sites and may offer information as a community service. Religious and community organizations or the local Chamber of Commerce also sponsor networking events. You need to try them more than once. These are dynamic meetings with constantly changing participants.
- Join the Society of Information Management. It exists only to serve top IT executives. I have attended meetings in Hartford and Stamford Connecticut. Both chapters are very active and attract fifty to sixty senior IT executives and other industry stakeholders at regular meetings. Networking opportunities abound. SIM chapters are active in Chicago, Atlanta and Boston, to name a few. SIM membership dues and meeting fees can be expensive, but they are worth it. The Hartford, CT Chapter has created a program granting one free year of membership to those in transition. Ask your local chapter if it has this program, or if it will establish something comparable to it. If you don't have a local chapter, consider starting one.
- Attend as many TENG, SIM, Execunet and other network meetings as possible. You may see some of the same people time after time, but they and you should have new experiences and business intelligence to share. We live in a dynamic, constantly changing world. You must stay connected with your network to reap its maximum value.
- Keep a professional looking nametag handy for these events.
- If you are feeling the negative emotional pressure of being unemployed, you have to make yourself take these steps. The simple act of getting out and speaking with others can be very uplifting, and may be tonic enough to revive your spirits, even at a meeting that renders little information or few leads. Speaking with others who share common experiences with you has a healing effect.

Mercer Field commented that when we start a new job, we must “oil the machinery” and build our network of alliances. Her words are most valuable for those of us in transition as well. Searching for a new position is an active building process. The goal of creating a valuable network is to have a vehicle that will help you through future job changes, not just this one. Creating it takes energy and consistent effort in the face of adversity. When I first entered the recruiting business, my manager and mentor said there are three kinds of players, “those who make it happen, those who watch it happen and those who wonder what happened”. Which one of these are you?

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