

Take Stock Of Your Business Network: Lise Cardinal

When the time comes for reviewing your networking strategy, the first thing to do is to draw up an inventory of the current network. This not only emphasizes the shortcomings or richness of the network, it also helps you to set your objectives for the future. In some cases, the best strategy will consist in deepening contact with your existing network.

The first step: List the members of your network

The largest error committed by many business people involves not considering some members of their networks as contacts. Therefore, start by making a list of the members of your network. Write down the names of people you know well enough to hold a short conversation with. You can use the following headings, or tailor your list to your own context.

- **Work:** Under this heading, list the names of employees, suppliers (of goods or services), business partners, competitors, mentors, etc.
- **Family:** Write down the names of members of your extended family, in-laws, and adult children. Don't forget your cousins in Val d'Or!
- **Personal life:** List your friends, of course, along with tennis partners, flute teacher, neighbours at your home and at your country place, members of your choir, other members of the parents' committee at the school your daughter attends, etc.
- **Business and social groups:** Note that you should only list the members you associate with. Simply belonging to the local chamber of commerce is not enough to count all its members as contacts. Also consider people you associate with through service clubs (Optimists, Rotary, etc.), an alumni network, a referral group (Business Network International), a local business people's organization, etc.

The second step: Assess how well you know your network

With the first list in hand, you now have a solid contact base that can be enriched and developed. Try the following exercise: do you know what each person on your list does (trade or profession)? Do you know what they specialize in? The things they really love? Aside from the heading you listed them under, what do you have in common?

Knowing your network well saves time and energy by using the resources at hand. Why go on a wild goose chase to get something from a potential contact when your sister-in-law could provide the same thing very easily. If you don't know the members of your network well enough, that's where to start. Gathering information could yield some pleasant surprises, as well as saving you time and money.

The third step: Determine what you need

What do you want to do? Break into an area of Quebec that you don't know very well? You'll need someone who knows the area better who can tell you about it, or introduce you to a local contact. Does a cousin live there? Or does one of your suppliers have a client there? Perhaps one of your employees is originally from there?

Are you searching for the gem who will write your business brochure and Web site content? Maybe you'll find her next to you at a table at the Chamber of Commerce dinner, or in the vice president of the parents' committee. Ask the members of your network first! Not only will you find what you want faster, but you'll also be sparking exchanges that are good for the network's vitality. A network of contacts is circular - what goes around, comes around.

Finally, remember that a business network is not only reserved for business, just like a personal network is not only for evenings and weekends.

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