I'm at a
Networking
Event
Now What???

Sandy Jones-Kaminski

Foreword by Courtney McKenzie

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"I'm at a Networking Event—Now What???" Book Excerpt

A Practical Guide to Getting the Most Out of Any Networking Event

By Sandy Jones-Kaminski

Foreword by Courtney McKenzie,
Email Marketing at Expedia, Inc.

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C o n t e n t s

Foreword by Courtney McKenzie

Being in the presence of expert networkers at a social gathering, business event, or coffee meeting is an inspiring experience. Dynamic, conversational, glib…they seemingly pull ideas and connections out of thin air. Excited and engaged, they are constantly seeking to bring people together, quick to remember names, events, and places, and as they move through a room, they leave warmth in their wake.

People think that true networking is a gift that allows one to easily connect people, ideas, and resources. In truth, it's an acquired skill that anyone can develop with the right guidance. Everyone has the potential to develop their networking skills and no one person will network in exactly the same way. It's your unique personality that will define the nature of your networking style and drive your success.

In the past few years, social networking has taken on a personality all of its own, with the introduction of business and personal tools on the Internet such as LinkedIn, Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter. With 50% of America using these tools, it would seem that everyone is networking these days. But in truth, these tools take us further away from the art of personal networking; the face-to-face meeting of people for the first time, the nurturing of connections, and the building of circles of friends.

With 70% of all communication being non-verbal, nothing replaces the communicative value of face-to-face interaction over a glass of wine or a cup of coffee. Sandy reminds us to always seek out those valuable 15 minutes of in-person conversation (even when they seem intimidating) so that you can put the face to the name.

As a business development pro and expert networker in her own right, Sandy has not lost the skill of the face-to-face meeting, and in the following pages she reminds us of the lost art of hosting a social gathering for the purpose of networking—of how to bring individuals of like-interests together, actively engage them in a social setting, and draw them out from behind the false front of their computer screens.

Throughout these pages Sandy is going to take you back to the basics of social networking. She will point out that the elements for true networking are all around you, just waiting to be pulled together (by you!). She will teach you how to bring warmth, personality, and legitimacy to social interactions and that these personal connections, these extended communities, are what really define how we go through life.

Bottom line. Everyone has the ability to network and, thanks to Sandy, everyone now has the perfect tool to learn how. If you're reading this foreword, you're one of the lucky ones who now have Sandy as your personal networking mentor. Don't let her down, there's no excuse now not to learn how to network. Sandy has excitedly created a "How-To" Guide that reveals all the "secrets" of networking.

Thank you for bringing us all together, Sandy! Thank you for being so acutely aware of all the connections around you.

Courtney McKenzie
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Introduction

I often describe myself as a networking enthusiast and believe that Malcolm Gladwell, author of 'The Tipping Point,' would likely identify me as a "Connector" and a "Maven."

In this book, I wish to illustrate that today's intense social networking environments practically demand that you have at least some knowledge of the best practices and effective tactics of networking, in order to achieve the results you are looking for from this potentially time consuming, yet very worthwhile, part of modern life.

For some, the contents of this book will serve solely as a reminder, but for many, it will offer some valuable insights on what to do, and just as importantly, what not to do while you're out there working hard to maintain good standing within your social networks (online or otherwise), and striving to grow and nurture your own valuable social capital. You'll also learn why you might want to consider becoming a "pay it forward" focused person, as well as how to be more memorable and thoughtful while putting forth all that effort.

And, while today, networking occurs as much online as it does offline (yes, you need to do both), we're not going to differentiate too much in this book, but it's worth mentioning that, as a general rule, it's always best that you don't do or say anything online that you wouldn't in person.

Let's Talk About Something First…

So, you went ahead and said yes, not maybe, to the invite you received for an upcoming networking event being hosted by your local "insert association/club/vendor name here." You received this invite via a forward from the same friend/mentor/coach/relative/boss who told you that you need to "get out there and network!" in order to find one or more of the following:

- A job

- Leads

- A mentor

- An agent

- A coach

- Recruiters

- New friends

- Clients

- Prospects

- Contacts

- Volunteers

Well, whether you're an extrovert or introvert, there are some best practices when it comes to approaching a networking event in a prepared and focused way. If it makes you feel better, you can call these rules, but whatever you call them, please try your best to mind them because after years of seeing all the ineffective ways people try to network, and simultaneously collect loads of

stories regarding the crazy things people will do to get what they want, I knew it was definitely time to put it all in writing and share it with you.

And, coupled with my own motivations, with where unemployment rates are these days, and the record number of people that are out there trying their hand at networking in these desperate times, I'm worried that the effective networkers out there will start a secret society of "power networkers" that will only help each other in the years to come.

Personally, I keep finding proof that the Pareto principle (80/20) applies to networking best practices in general:

Twenty percent of the people truly get it, and then about 80% of folks don't. What I think happens is that the 20% of us are doing the majority of the power networking, and then acting like the "Connectors" (Gladwell/Tipping Point reference) we are, and pretty much doing all the heavy lifting for the remaining 80%.

If you are an aspiring power networker you probably think this is great, but I say that's only the case *if* you always want to be in that role, or are a full-time recruiter. I have seen proof that it is also not so good in that we're often only really networking amongst ourselves. I believe that the goal needs to be that the folks that "get it" must help the 80% out there see the light and continue to help show them the way. This is partly why I wrote a white paper on the topic of networking earlier in 2009 and what led to my writing this book.

Networking—an Introduction

I realize that I can't dig into this topic without first acknowledging that there exists some general anxiety, which many people feel when merely faced with an invite to a networking event, and in many cases with good reason. Heck, even some of us fearless types can also have that reaction because we have all too often been beyond frustrated with the outcomes of, and behaviors at, many of the networking events we attend.

At gatherings in Chicago, San Francisco, NYC, Silicon Valley, and now Seattle, I have frequently witnessed behaviors from the old "I'm talking to you, but try not to notice my eyes scanning every other person's nametag that walks by please," to the "So, Sandy what's Bella Domain?" And then the eyes glazing over because you, your situation, or words don't immediately appear to be a likely prospect for them. It's no wonder most people experience anxiety!

As many of us know, the joke is quite often on these shortsighted folks because, sometimes while we don't appear to be a prospect, our husband, sister, friend, cousin or co-worker just might be the type of decision maker with whom they really want or need to connect.

Quite a few years ago, I recognized that there had to be a better way to make and cultivate quality connections, so I'd rather unwittingly started taking the "paying it forward" approach to networking. I will attempt to share my knowledge here.

The Pay It Forward Approach

What's the pay-it-forward approach? Well, thanks to that movie with the kid from Sixth Sense in it, a lot of us understand that the expression "pay it forward" is used to describe the concept of asking that a good deed be repaid by having it done to others instead.

What this basically means is that you try to be attentive wherever you are, for opportunities to help someone else. What a novel idea, huh?

Perhaps you have an older co-worker who is too proud to ask for help with the shared login for the company Twitter account, or maybe you're at your company's open house event and see someone who looks like they could really use some insider introductions, hovering just past the entrance to the party. Well, the belief is that by helping either of these folks, you can quite possibly change people's attitudes about at least a little part of their world through your unobtrusive acts of kindness.

My favorite part of all this, and what I attempted to demonstrate at the Pay It Forward (PIF) Parties I've hosted, is that when a person thanks you and wants to "repay" you (that is, pay it "back"), let them know that what you'd really like is for them to pay it "forward"—you'd like them to do something nice for a few other people they don't know (my guests at my PIF Parties, for example), and ask those people to do something nice for a few more people. The idea is to make a conscious effort to increase the goodness of your corner of the world, and networking situations are the ideal environments in which to give it a go.

The Debate Is Over

There's little debate today that most of us should always be networking, and the truth is most of us actually are. We do it all the time—whether it's at a professional association's luncheon event, at a friend's wedding, at a church gathering, the senior center where we volunteer once a month, or the sidelines of a soccer field. Don't even get me started on how many people make new key contacts at their kids' sports event. (I admit it does make me think hard about adopting sometimes!) People can network or connect with others in a long line at the post office or even at the coffee shop you go to every workday. The question is: Are you making the most of your time and the opportunities available to you each and every day?

ACTION:

Over the course of the next week, take note of how many *new* people you encounter. And yes, seatmates on the bus count!

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Let's First Define Networking

Before we dig into what a networking event is, let's start with the definition of the word network. According to *The Oxford Dictionary*:

nétwerk n. & v. a group of people who exchange information, contacts, and experience for professional or social purposes.

Therefore, networking can be defined as one's efforts to create this group.

And, in that same vein, a 2009 study on professional networking and career advancement, sponsored by Upwardly Mobile, Inc. (http://www.upmo.com) and Pepperdine's Graziadio School of Business Management (http://bschool.pepperdine.edu), defined networking as:

Proactively reaching out to colleagues, finding answers to colleague questions, researching future connections and making new connections.

Does networking mean you're looking to use people to achieve selfish goals, or opportunistically ask people for help? No, of course not! In

fact, almost all your networking can help other people as much as it can help you. In any industry or career level, networking helps you make connections in a personal way. It aids you in building relationships of support and respect, and enables you to discover and create mutually beneficial connections.

How can you ensure this? For starters, next time you set out to "network," instead of thinking "What can I get out of this?" think, "What can I give to this?" It's an approach no serious professional in any field or at any career stage should go without today. In fact, early in their careers, folks in the sales and marketing arenas learn that you never know where you might meet your next key contact, partner, client, or even new friend. But remember, building relationships takes time and the best networking starts when you don't need it. Then when you do need it, those connections are available.

While events focused solely on networking are everywhere these days, most of us have also noticed that conferences and other professional gatherings often carve out specific networking sections to their programming. It might be before the sessions begin for the day or after a day's worth of training seminars, during a happy hour. And then in some cases, industry networking events are instead called "socials," and sometimes they go by the term "open house."

Today, thanks to many of the online social networking tools created within the past 10 years, it's pretty obvious that networking matters to just about everyone.

Why Do People Bother Networking?

Another way to think about networking is as the deliberate process of making connections for mutual benefit. However, whether you network to make friends (new to town), find a new job, source candidates, develop your current career, explore new career options, learn, conduct research, obtain referrals, collect intel, or simply to broaden your professional horizons, it is important to focus on networking as an exchange of information, contacts, or experiences.

There's also the fact that unless you love cold calling, networking is one of the most effective ways to generate leads and referrals for whatever it is you're looking. For lots of professionals today, many of the people attending in-person events or participating in an online discussion could be potential employees, clients, employers, or even vendors, as well as referral sources for any of these things.

According to an April 2009 study by AfterCollege®, *the most effective job search method by the 4.4% who had an easy time finding work* (26 out of 670 respondents) was something you can only do via personal networking:

Seventy-six percent said speaking to someone who already works at the company of interest was **the** way to do it.

The study also pointed out that while social networking sites were used heavily by many of the respondents, their effectiveness in finding a job was reflected in only 11% of the responses. And compared to the above, only 4% of those who found their job search easy, mentioned social networks as being effective tools.

Job search methods found effective by those who had an easy time finding work		
Speak to someone who already works at the company of interest	76%	19
Apply directly to the company/organization	72%	18
Search an online job board (e.g. AfterCollege, Monster, CareerBuilder)	68%	17
Speak to a professor, teacher, instructor, or dean	64%	16
Speak to friends and/or family members	60%	15
Attend a school career fair	56%	14
Visit the career section of the organization/corporation's site	56%	14
Contact an employment contractor, agency, or recruiter	44%	11
Attend on-campus information sessions/interviews	40%	10
Visit the career center at your school	36%	9
Network at an association or club (trade/industry)	36%	9
Look in the newspaper	32%	8
Read/subscribe to an e-newsletter	16%	4
Read about it or chat about it in a blog that pertained to a career interest	12%	3
Chat about it at a social networking site, such as Facebook or LinkedIn	4%	1

A survey recommendation:

Network through personal touch, and don't rely on social networking.

Use emerging technologies to enhance your existing personal networking, but don't let technology replace those activities. Speaking to someone who works at a company of interest was rated as one of the most effective ways of finding a job.

(Source: AfterCollege® Student & Alumni Snapshot Survey, AfterCollege, Inc. April 2009)

The 2009 study published by Upwardly Mobile, Inc. (http://www.upmo.com) offered some additional insights and even identified an enviable group they call the networking "elite." Despite the plethora of online tools out there, this group of high-earning and high career-level professionals still manages to achieve truly effective networking by whacking through the weeds and focusing on what matters—real, mutually beneficial partnerships.

They found that the "elites" identified in their study have learned by experience how to leverage networking to serve others, create rapport, proactively manage relationships, channel the right information and opportunities, and accelerate their journeys along chosen career paths. Elites have clearly learned to leverage today's online networking paradigm to break barriers of gender, education, age, class and proximity.

The study cites:

Elites know what most "networking" professionals do not: that effective networking today is about quickly cutting through the clutter and creating meaningful online and offline connections, relationships and rapport—the kind that enable the giving and receiving of trust. Elites also know that anyone, at any salary level, can "do" effective networking; our study shows that networking is a key driver behind higher salaries and career advancement.

Elite networkers report networking as enabling access to pre-qualified resources that give them "an edge." In their own words:

"Networking is a great way to access a pre-qualified talent pool; it's like I already had the initial interview."
– Elite Networker

"I network for publicity; I blog and write, too. I want people to know who I am. Networking is, most importantly, about access to resources. I noticed other execs always had a virtual team they could call on. They always found the right resource, and it gave them an edge…. Adding people to your network is like building a friendship: you have to dedicate some time and effort to it."
– Elite Networker, CFO, Startup

"I network to stay connected to the business community and identify potential work. Business development is constant for me, and I found that the best way to develop new business is through referrals. Another reason is to maintain an awareness of what's going on in the industry. Yet another is to stay connected with colleagues."
– Elite Networker, VP

"Give away your time, talent, effort and treasure, and you will gain something else."
– Elite Networker, SVP

(Source: Professional Networking and Career Advancement Report, Upwardly Mobile, Inc. 2009)

About the Author

Sandy Jones-Kaminski is a self-described net-working enthusiast and an accomplished business development professional. In 2002, Sandy launched her own partnership marketing and biz dev strategy consulting practice called Bella Domain, LLC
(http://www.belladomain.com). Prior to becoming an entreprenuer, Sandy led the strategic partner program as an executive director and regional sales manager for TriNet, an HR business process outsourcing company based in Northern California. In that role, Sandy was responsible for managing business development programs with partner sales teams and channels. Previously, Sandy was also a VP-level operations executive within the business intelligence arena. First at Information Resources, Inc., and then at Strategic Media Research, both in Chicago. She is also a recent VP of Networking for one of the

largest chapters of the American Marketing Association. With more than a decade of experience in business development and partner/client relations for SaaS and business services companies, Sandy knows how to make meaningful connections, cultivate relationships, host some great networking events, and create what she refers to as good "social capital." She can help you or your team with everything, from developing a networking or business development strategy, to getting value out of online social networking tools, to your own personal branding and social capital creation. Not surprisingly, Sandy's active on numerous social media sites, such as LinkedIn and Facebook, and enjoys traveling and exploring the world with her favorite person and traveling partner, her husband Keith Kaminski. You can connect with her directly at
http://www.belladomain.com.

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