

LifeMapSM



"LifeMap is a navigational tool to help you on your path towards personal and professional success. Our belief is that you can achieve a more rewarding career, a more productive organization and a more enjoyable and abundant life."

September 15, 2009

This Month's Message:

Networking For Introverts.

Paths Forward

• Need Career Coaching?

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Networking For Introverts.

We've all read enough articles and books about jobs and careers to know that networking is an essential tool to have in your career toolbox and I won't reiterate all the reasons

· Tired of boring meetings??

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why in this edition of LifeMap. However, there is a problem with networking: many people dislike it and some avoid it completely. Though extroverts tend to be fairly proficient networkers even they find that the time and energy required to build and maintain a useful professional network can be demanding. For introverts, networking can be almost painful. But like many things in life, the fact that something is difficult is not reason enough to avoid it

People who are naturally shy feel apprehension, lack confidence or feel awkward in approaching or being approached by others especially in new settings, unfamiliar situations or with unfamiliar people. Unfortunately making contacts in new settings, unfamiliar situations or with unfamiliar people is an essential element of networking. If this process is something you avoid because of moderate discomfort (either emotional or physiological) you must first realize that this is not uncommon nor is it a "disorder" of some sort. (I should note that *extreme* feelings of shyness *could* be a sign of social phobia, which can be overcome with the assistance of a skilled therapist. What we are talking about in this article is the moderate shyness that many people experience.)

Your shyness may be an aspect of your personality, it may be an inherited genetic trait or it may be a reaction to the environment in which you grew up. It is, simply, a part of who you are. And, irrespective of its genesis, it can be overcome if you are willing to address it. Let's take a look at some ways you can develop a sense of ease around new people, build your networking confidence, advance your career, and help you get more enjoyment from both business and personal social situations.

Paths Forward

· **Scope It Out.** If you are an introvert a conference room, company function or any other networking event can look like one huge hall full of unknown people where anything could happen. Fear of the unknown is a big part of shyness. But, in reality, most of these events are fairly predictable; agendas are usually published ahead of time and the organizer may share the registration list with you so you can identify one or two folks whom you already know. Scoping out the situation ahead of time will help you lower your pre-networking jitters and provide some material to help you prepare a few relevant conversation starters.

• **Have 3 Ice Breakers Ready.** Be creative; move beyond "So, what do you do?" which can be awkward if the person you're speaking to is currently out of work. Try some such as:

- Have you attended this group's meetings before? Have you found them helpful?
- What business books (or web sites or blogs) have you recently enjoyed?
- What do you like most about your job (or career, profession, employer)?
- How is your employer dealing with the current economic climate?
- What would be a great next step in your career?

You will often be asked the same question in return, which begins the give and take of a conversation.

• **Buddy Up.** You don't have to do this alone. Walking into a networking event is easier with someone to chat with. Find out if a colleague, former co-worker or friend has heard about this event and see if he or she would be interested in attending. A good idea is for each of you to share what your goals for this meeting are ahead of time. A bad idea is to cling to each other to avoid making new contacts.

• **Build a relationship.** Networking is a two-way street. It is not all about you. Your goal is to start building relationships. Ask more questions, make fewer statements, listen actively, and offer help where you can. If you have never read [How to Win Friends & Influence People](#) by Dale Carnegie - go read it. If you *have* read *How To Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie - go read it again. It provides an accessible, user-friendly understanding of human nature and will teach you how to connect with others in a humane and genuine way. It is a fantastic networking tool.

• **Good Times / Bad Times.** A couple of weeks ago a business friend of mine asked if I had recently heard from a mutual acquaintance. When I said I hadn't, he laughed, "You will". This was an inside joke between us referring to the fact that neither of us ever hears from this guy unless he's looking for a new job. (For him, networking is a one-way street and more than a few folks know this.) The best time to build a network is when you need it the least and you have the most to offer. That way your calls will be answered when you most need help. Also - the best way to build a network is gradually. Suddenly adding tons of new "friends" or contacts to your social networking site is a sure sign to your current employer that you're job hunting and hints at

desperation to prospective employers.

• **The Future Is Unknown (mostly).** Let's face it. If you could see the future (and next week's PowerBall numbers) you'd probably be reading this from Tahiti or aboard your yacht in the Caribbean. But there is one aspect of your future that I can successfully predict: unless you retire fully and completely from your current job you will need to rely on help from your network to land your next job. It is going to be more - not less - crucial in the future. It is a necessary career skill for introvert and extrovert alike. Building your networking skills now is akin to learning to pack your own parachute before you need it. (For more on this topic go to www.drpaulpowers.com, click on LifeMap Archive, open 10/23/07, *Pack Your Parachute - Now*).

• **Consult an expert.** If you have tried some of my suggestions and find that your shyness or introversion is still getting in the way of your network building you may need more assistance that I can provide in this venue. As I noted above this may be someone trained in treating social phobias and you can find such a person with a referral from your physician. However, for many people a little of what I call biblio-therapy may suffice. There are a number of books available on the topic of shyness and introversion but one I like a lot because of its focus on specific strategies is [The Successful Introvert: How to Enhance Your Job Search and Advance Your Career](#) by Wendy Gelberg. Try it - all you have to lose is your painful shyness.

Life Map is about helping people of all personality types - introverts and extroverts alike - to understand and harness their unique qualities in pursuit of their professional and personal goals.

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Have an issue or question you'd like Dr. Paul to address in a future edition? Send an email to the email address list below.

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Dr. Paul

Email: drpaul@drpaulpowers.com

Phone: 781-237-0550

Web: <http://www.drpaulpowers.com>

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