

Why aren't you networking?

Hands up if you find networking easy? Yep, about as easy as extracting oil from a paperclip...I thought so. Don't get me wrong, there are plenty of seasoned networkers out there but for the majority of us, networking remains an unconquered mountain.

In a recent survey, Network Central members were asked "What is your greatest networking challenge? The main responses were:

- *No time* – truth is, effective networking can actually save you time by giving you a support network and an instant database of people to call for information, help and/or products or services. Use your diary and schedule time to attend just one or two networking events regularly and to follow up effectively. You can collect all the business cards in the world but if they gather dust on your desk, they are worthless.
- *Meeting new people* - do you enjoy making friends? That's all networking really is – be excited about the amazing and inspirational people you are yet to meet. In reality, these scary new people are just as nervous as you.
- *People won't find me interesting* – what is wrong with us?? We constantly doubt ourselves when we are actually pretty amazing! Everybody is unique in some way and if we appreciate the differences in ourselves and each other we will go a long way.
- *Don't know what to say* – try saying "hello"! Then what?? Ask questions – but open ended ones. Allow a person to let you in to their space. Don't ask questions like "how are you?" – "good", "how was your trip here this morning" – "good", "Isn't this weather lovely?" – "yep". Ask something like, "what brings you to this network this morning?" And let the conversation flow from there. Then LISTEN! And keep listening. Engage yourself in that current conversation fully and give that person the respect they deserve. Don't look around for other people to speak to.
- *Introducing myself to a stranger* – after you say hello, they are no longer strangers are they?

- *Don't know how to leave a conversation* – Exit gracefully. “I don't want to take up any more of your time but it has been a pleasure speaking with you”, “I must go to the bathroom now but it has been an absolute pleasure meeting you”, now please don't think that every time someone wants to go to the bathroom they can't wait to get away from you! Don't promise to follow up if you have no intention of doing so.

Networking is not only a sanity-saver for busy people, it is an extremely powerful business marketing tool. It is a well known fact that people do business with people they like and how are they going to like you if you hide behind an inbox? Be proud of who you are – you are absolutely someone worth talking to and everyone else is just as nervous as you. So go and find that registration form, send it in and enjoy your new social life. Now, let me just find that paperclip....

Kim McGuinness is managing director of Network Central and co-author of *Network or Perish* – learn the secrets of master networkers. Network Central runs many events such as the Businesswomen's Breakfast Series, Dynamic Business Series and Thinking Parents Forum. For more information go to www.networkcentral.com.au