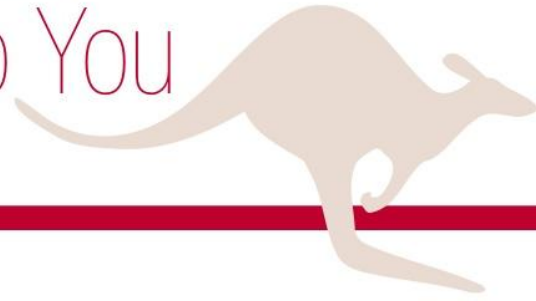


From **ROO** to You



April 2010

Networking: Career Essential or Time Vampire?

Networking, whether through traditional means or "social networking", is touted as the latest career essential. But how do we figure out the difference between essential networking and simply gathering business cards and surfing social networking sites? We all have many professional and personal obligations. How much time is appropriate to dedicate to networking and where should you invest your time? From an organizational perspective, do you need to establish a social networking policy, or figure out how to staff your next big project when you don't have funds to hire a full time employee?

I admit I am a bit of a LinkedIn and Facebook junkie – it is easy to lose hours reading group postings and people's profiles. While Facebook quizzes can be a time vampire, social media helped me to reconnect with former colleagues, gain introductions through shared connections, and build online credibility that have led to face to face relationships. These online sources augment, rather than replace, my face-to-face networking (and yes, I can direct you to the nearest Caribou in virtually any Twin Cities location).

In this premiere issue of Monthly Musings, I will share my recent networking experiences, practical tips for you, and suggestions for your organization to make the most of networking opportunities

As always, we welcome your input, insights and stories.

My Network and Me

Last month I attended the 2010 Joint Dinner of Women's Professional Associations. I was thrilled to be working the Women of Influence booth, sharing our passion for giving back, making a difference and creating change in issues that impact the success of women and girls, with the attendees.

From ROO to You



www.womenofinfluenceinc.org

When I attended the dinner for the first time last year, I knew only my host and while I had a good time, it was a bit intimidating, and I did not really feel connected to the event. What a difference a year can make. Last week, during the networking hour I had the pleasant surprise of reconnecting with that host, a recent client, a former Toastmasters colleague, a recruiter I am getting to know, as well as enjoying a terrific evening with my fantastic WOI friends and colleagues. What made the difference for me?

Investing in my network....investing in my network before I needed it.

Keynote speaker Julie Gilbert's address reinforced this important topic. Julie, President and CEO of Wolf Means Business, emphasized two main points:

- 1) **Find Your Passion**
- 2) **Build Your Network**

My passion for non-profits and small business success provided me with the courage to strike out on my own with ROO Solutions almost one year ago. Looking back, the investments I made in my network throughout the last several years have paid dividends in bringing new clients, new relationships and exposure to new ideas. I hope the suggestions below will assist you, and your organization, to identify the organizations and relationships most worthy of investing your precious networking time.

For You: Networking Tips for you

In today's business environment, "who you know" both inside and outside your organization is critical for your current and future success. But networking is about more than gathering business cards; it is a long-term investment in your future. The tips below will help you identify strengths and gaps in your network, and focus your networking efforts.

Tip #1: Know Your Network

Take 10 minutes to map your professional and personal networks. Is there an opportunity to leverage resources from one network to benefit another? For example, would a former coworker with expertise in international distribution be willing to review your company's plan to enter a new international market?

From Roo to You



A basic network mapping template can be downloaded from the "What's New" section of my website: http://localhost:52785/Roo%20Solutions%20Website/Whats_new/whats_new.htm

Tip #2: Identify your personal and professional passions

There are only so many hours in a day. Deciding which subjects, groups and causes you are most passionate about will help narrow your focus, while maintaining some sense of a personal life. Make a list of what you want to learn, causes you actively support, and what professional activities give you so much energy you would do it for free. Is your list balanced between professional and personal pursuits? Is it realistic? If not, cut the list in half, and halve it again if necessary. Force rank the remaining items. You may also be able to find ways to marry these passions by sharing your professional expertise with a community group you support, mentoring a young professional in your organization, or participating in a company giving group.

Tip #3: Close the gaps

Now that you have identified your network and clarified your passions, you have probably found that some areas of your network are stronger than others, and there may be areas that you have not yet committed sufficient time to developing a strong network. Prioritize these gaps and research how to establish connections. Is there a local association or online networking group that loves to learn about advanced cost accounting or is on a quest for create the perfect pesto as much as you? Probably.

Tip #4: Keep in Touch

Networking is not an end, in and of itself, nor is it an event. Networking is both intentional and a long term-commitment. Your efforts should focus on gaining knowledge, contacts, and relationships that result in development and opportunities for you and others. Determine which contacts are most important to you, how they like to be communicated with and what their interests are. Reach out to them when you read an interesting article about their industry, learned something new that maybe of interest, or just to say hello on occasion.

But I'm an introvert....I can't network. If you break out in a sweat at the thought of professional speed dating, think about who you already know, where you can lend expertise informally, and who might be willing to tag team with you at a networking event. If picking up the phone is uncomfortable, send a card or a copy of an article with a handwritten note from you.

Tip #5: Pay it Forward

From Roo to You



Ok, I've saved the big reveal for the finale. **Networking is not about you – it's about them!** Others are networking for the same reasons you are – to generate business, referrals, or to gain access to knowledge and expertise. You may meet someone who is looking for an expert in an area where you have contacts. Offer to connect these individuals. Provide you have taken time up front to vet the resource, both parties will probably appreciate the introduction. They are also likely to remember your assistance, and do the same for you in the future.

Invest 5 minutes per day in maintaining your network. It feels good to be connected and will reap benefits. You can do it!

For Your Organization: **Social Networking & Your Employees**

All of this "social networking" is well and good on someone's personal time, but you have a business to run. How do you determine whether an employee's 15 minutes per day online is purposeful "social networking" or just a waste of valuable company time? The distinctions are not easy to make at first blush, but by establishing a clear company policy regarding social media, you can lay the ground work for appropriate professional networking, and a basis for addressing excessive surfing.

When implementing a social media policy, consider the following:

Separation of employee professional and personal lives

It is important to set expectations with your employees regarding appropriately representing the company, as well as not speaking "on behalf" of the Company without explicit authorization. This includes representing oneself professionally on the Company's Facebook and LinkedIn pages.

The February 15th edition of Time Magazine reported that 70% of HR Professionals use social media to screen candidates. Is this a practice your organization will endorse, and if so, how will potentially damaging information be handled? What if the employee or job candidate did not post this information or photo personally?

Appropriate employee time and emphasis on social media

The amount of time employees are permitted to use social media may vary by position. For example, a marketer, recruiter or sales position may need to spend more time building customer or candidate relationships than a Maintenance or Finance employee. Rather than placing a time limit on social media across the board, you may want to structure your policy to state that social networking sites are to be used during work hours only for purposes that

From Roo to You



further an employee's professional knowledge or legitimate business purpose. Restrict purely social surfing completely, or limit it to break times.

IT infrastructure / bandwidth

Your organization may want or need to restrict internet access based on your IT infrastructure. Limit personal or non-business use to non-peak usage times.

Intellectual Property / confidentiality

Many online sites for professional publications, associations, and other social networking groups have ongoing interactive dialogues with peers asking questions or seeking advice. This can be a great resource for your employees to gain quick access to information (although it may not be reliable) and to develop a peer network. At the same time, this creates opportunities to share information inappropriately. Make sure your policy reminds employees that they are not to intentionally, or unintentionally, release confidential information about the company, its clients, vendors, R&D efforts or any other information that is not available to the general public. Employees should receive authorization before sharing any company documents and work examples with online networks.

Consider when and where you want your leaders and employees to spend face-to-face networking time.

Some organizations find it beneficial for employees to participate in professional association groups, whether for their specific profession or an industry association. These groups typically involve a monthly educational session and for additional investment, peer-based groups. The value of such peers groups depends on the degree to which your employees can gain access to expertise and you can promote your organization and expertise to others.

For additional strategies to leverage networks within and outside of your organization, ask us about our **Collaborating Beyond Boundaries** workshop.