



Working Together for a Better World

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Networking with Purpose

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Networking with purpose can **enhance your knowledge, increase your outreach, and double your impact**. The focus of this paper is to present the importance of networking as the basis for building and maintaining a regional network.

Let me open with a few stories and experiences about networking.

During a recent consulting assignment with an American organization working internationally, I asked the 20 participants how much networking they did. The answer was “All the time. A lot.” But when I asked what the results were, the answer was “Not much.” This is curious because it struck me that they had a lot of meetings and a lot of interactions but that all of these meetings and interactions lacked purpose. At an event later that night when 120 people were coming to hear me talk about social enterprise and global leadership, I invited two of the staffers from the organization to join me. At the reception after my presentations, I met many of the participants and engaged five or six of them in commitments for follow-up activities. When I reconnected with my two colleagues, I learned that they both talked to just a few people but neither had actually reached any conclusion or follow-up action. To me it is so simple: **Every meeting and every interaction can have an outcome – who is going to do what and when**. This is the simplest of all networks to build.

On another occasion, I was sitting at a conference in Kyiv listening to experts talk about fundraising and national development. Next to me was a young woman and we chatted a bit. Then I was surprised when she was introduced as the next speaker – she was Olga Kurylenko, the Ukrainian model and movie star who appeared in one of the James Bond movies. If I had been with a Ukrainian NGO, I would have involved her in my organization’s promotion and work because we talked and I found out about several of her areas of interest. **Networking attitude can produce unexpected results**.

As yet another example, in a discussion and exercise on leadership development, I asked the participants to identify one or two leaders whose leadership skills or characteristics they especially admired. This is the first step I often use to get participants to think more deeply about the skills and characteristics they want to develop themselves. I was shocked, however, when one participant identified Hitler and another identified Stalin as their leadership models. What I realized is that I had neglected to say ‘leaders who do something good’. And of course, the two participants were correct about the leaders they identified as having effective leadership skills in communication, motivation and control. I mention this example because it is always important to say ‘leadership for what’ – just as: **it is important to say networking for what**.

1) Learning from Networking

So what are the benefits of networking? Why is networking important?

1. My experience with international NGOs is proof enough. I worked for Save the Children and Foster Parents Plan, both located in the US with affiliates in other countries. As fundraising director and later as executive director, I would meet with counterparts from the other national affiliates once or twice each year to share stories, successes and problems, and to learn from each other so we could do a better job in our own work. We shared our experiences candidly including the steps we took or the steps we should have taken. This **learning by sharing gave us all an extraordinary advantage** because the learning was practical and applicable to our own activities. NGOs that have affiliates or networks in other countries have a significant competitive advantage in their learning by sharing.
2. Another example is from an American newspaper article on misleading advertising for child sponsorship organizations. I was fundraising director at Save the Children then and I called the fundraising directors of the five other major organizations in this field [my main competitors] to meet together to discuss how to respond to the newspaper article. We agreed the best response was to create a new code of advertising standards for our organizations. We drafted a code and each of us took the draft code back to our organizations and said to the executive staff that “All the others are going to endorse the code and therefore we must do so as well.” Within a week, all six organizations had agreed to follow the new code and this is what we communicated to the newspapers – not a denial or cover up but rather saying we understood the problem and had taken steps to correct it in the future. The media coverage immediately turned favorable and highlighted how responsible and trustworthy these organizations were. **By having a united front, we all gained a positive reputation** far more than if any one of us had tried this on our own.

But the bigger result was that the six of us found out that, even though we were competitors in the marketplace, we were nice folks after all and that we could actually learn a lot from each other. I organized a second meeting and when I went to check it out with my boss, he said, “I guess it’s okay that you go but just don’t say anything.” When the six of us met, this was the first thing I said – and everyone else laughed and said their boss said the same thing. We quickly agreed to forget we shouldn’t say anything. We ended up meeting once or twice a year for the next five years or so. We shared and shared and shared. I learned so much from my colleagues/competitors! After all, who would know more about the business I was in than my closest competitors? No professor, no course, no book could match the richness of our sharing. About 10 years later, I looked at the fundraising results of the six organizations. Their increase in income was double or triple that of other NGOs. Learning matters. Sharing helps. **Networking is a uniquely effective strategy for learning.**

3. My third example comes from a training program I was doing with 25 NGO executive directors in Romania. All of them were working with orphans and placements in family settings. We were at a large hotel in Bucharest talking about reaching out to prospective donors. The second day I noticed that Canon, the camera company, was having a meeting of their executives from the region. As we were about to take a coffee break, I told the participants about the people they could meet from Canon and asked them to practice their networking and fundraising introductions with them. After the coffee break, I asked for feedback. None. Not one of the executives had talked with someone from the company. So at the lunch break, I went up to someone with a Canon name tag and said, “I am Ken Phillips. I’d like to meet the senior executive here. Can you point him or her out to me?” I saw who it was and went up to him and gave a brief introduction about who we were and what we were doing and asked him to come in to talk for 15 minutes about Canon’s

corporate social responsibility. After a few questions, he said he would come the next morning at 10 AM.

He arrived right on time and gave an excellent statement about the company's philosophy and practice of supporting NGOs. He answered question after question and finally at the end of nearly 2 hours, one of the participants said, "I know you're a very busy person. You said you would come in here to talk with us for 15 minutes and now you been here 2 hours. Why?" His answer was simple: "I'm here because of what you do and because I am an orphan." The participants were amazed, energized, and freed to network with him. They crowded around him asking how they might connect with him and his associates and pursue their mutual interests. Why is this a story about networking? **Serendipity. Unexpected opportunity. You never know what you get until you make contact.** Initially they were all afraid to talk to people because they lacked something, perhaps self-confidence, perhaps belief that something could come of the contact. But the story shows how the unexpected can occur and that open-ended networking with purpose to advance your organization can find unexpected connections and important benefits.

4. Years ago, I attended a workshop in the Tavistock tradition. It was all about networking. The first day with 100+ participants was simply creating groups of 10 to 15 people. I thought this was rather silly and, being an introvert, I just sat there and waited (having no purpose to network!). Finally, someone came up and asked me to join her group which I did. The second day was working in the group to make it a better group. Individual members could leave the group and go somewhere else and other people could come in and try to join the group. This became more interesting to me. There was certainly competition within the group for influence or, if you will, dominance. Over 10 hours I played the game and we ended up with what we all considered an ideal group. In fact, for the last hour or so, we were all just casually chatting, everyone was content, and the occasional visitor who came in to join was quickly shoed away. It was a good experience in how individual members of the group relate to each other and how they accept or don't accept others who seek to join the group. The third day was interacting in relationship with the other groups. You could send ambassadors to negotiate with other groups for something you wanted and you could receive ambassadors and accept or reject their requests. Again, this was all about networking for a purpose. One of the insights it gave me was how powerful first impressions are – that instantaneous feeling you have when you first encounter someone else. Even more powerful was the realization that **building cohesion within the group and finding ways to motivate each person were critical to success.**
5. Going back millions of years, men were hunters and women were nurturers. In Donizetti's opera *L'elisir d'amore* (The Elixir of Love), the guy falls in love with a girl and runs after her in a brutish way. The girl is in love with the same guy but isn't sure what to do. The guy sees a magic man who gives him a potion for love. The guy drinks at all at once and since it is actually alcohol ends up pursuing the girl in a drunken fashion. She is all set to accept her other suitor, a much older man, but (since this is Opera) the older man is called away and leaves. Meanwhile the young guy has sobered up and finally gets serious and nice. The girl also meets the magic man who tries to sell her the same magic potion but she replies "I don't need your magic potion. I have my eyes and my smile." The guy again pursues her but now in a more appropriate restrained manner and she replies with her eyes and her smile. Happy ending. So men and women may actually network in different ways, and when they do it right it succeeds. The point of the story here is that sometimes you want a magic man (a consultant?) to network effectively, but generally you don't as you have your own skills and ways. **Know what you have. Use what works.**

6. I recently read a great article by Bill Abrams, president of Trickle Up, a small US NGO, on “Think small: What is the future for small NGOs?” He asked: “How do we generate significantly more revenue in order to have more impact? Compete for funding with much larger NGO? Afford the sort of necessary capacities – strong M&E, effective knowledge management, investment in innovation – that would enable us to thrive in the 21st century and fulfill our missions with maximum impact?” His answer: **small NGOs can only compete through greater collaboration, communication and sharing.**

- “Sharing expertise and perhaps also sharing services (for example, two or three smaller NGOs sharing one HR director);
- “Sharing resources like policy and procedures statements, strategic plans (or portions of them, such as the environmental or trend scan that most of us do periodically), and other organizational tools;
- “Leveraging the entrepreneurial nature of many smaller NGOs so that they can be laboratories for new ideas and approaches that could benefit other organizations and the development field in general;
- “Creating more forums and ‘safe spaces’ where leaders of smaller NGOs come together to talk about common problems and opportunities....”

Conclusion of this section: By networking you can learn more from your competitors/colleagues than from anywhere else and you can achieve greater results for your own organization. In countries with a well-developed civil society, there are numerous associations which bring people together to share and learn from each other – fundraising associations, PR networks, monitoring and evaluation working groups, executive director retreats, etc.

2) Getting Results from Networking

There is greater impact when people come together in common cause.

1. When I was chairman of a small neighborhood Association in Providence, Rhode Island, USA, we developed it into an effective neighborhood leader. When the mayor heard we were getting a good turnout at our meetings, he called and asked me if he could attend. I said, “No. That is, not unless you bring your sanitation manager because we have a project to improve the cleanliness of our streets and we want your support.” He agreed and at the next meeting both the sanitation manager and the mayor attended and heard our plans and requests for their involvement. The mayor said, “Of course we will help.” The sanitation manager said, “Yes. We will help.” And they did. Same for the housing inspector, police chief, parks manager, fire chief, etc. Because we represented 100 neighbors, we were listened to, respected, and supported. I recently saw that the same association just had its 3rd annual “Conversation with our elected officials” with seven elected officials from the city and state participating in topics ranging from transportation to economic development, education to sustainability, quality of life to collaboration between officials and citizens. **All of this success resulted from the bringing together a multitude of voices from the community.**
2. In the same way, because I volunteered for this neighborhood Association, I was able to connect with our representative and senators in the federal government who were interested see what we were doing to improve the neighborhood. I walked the streets at different times talking with Sen. Claiborne Pell, Sen. John Chafee, and Representatives Claudine Schneider and Jack Reed who were later able to help me in federal funding through USAID for Foster Parents Plan. In a similar

way, after we secured a donation from Hasbro for the neighborhood work, I was able to involve its CEO Alan Hassenfeld on our board of advisors and secure even larger support for my NGO. I see all this as a public-private partnership, government and citizens working together for a better world, networking for a purpose. It was **networking for advocacy** and it was possible because I represented large numbers of neighborhood residents and national donors.

3. One of the hot topics when I joined the World Wildlife Fund was a fundraising dinner they had recently organized. There were 10 or 12 multi-billionaire couples with Prince Philip from the UK chairing an elaborate dinner. I was impressed until I asked staff what were the results of the dinner. I was told “None!” Apparently, there was no plan of action, no division of responsibilities among staff, and no pursuit (i.e., no networking with purpose) at the dinner. On other occasions, I have noticed that responsible staff members spent time talking with each other and were not focused on networking with other participants. Clearly something was missing. At any fundraising event, dinner, meeting or gathering, a clear plan of action with individual responsibilities is needed for all staff and volunteers involved. This is **eventing with purpose!**

Networking with Purpose at an Event

1. A clear measurable objective of the desired outcomes from the event (e.g., funds raised)
2. A list of attendees, who they are, and what they have done in the past
3. Indication of what the organization would like each attendee to do in the future
4. Designation of the primary staff or other contact for each attendee
5. A clear plan of action for who does what with whom before, at, and after the event
6. Suggestions as appropriate about how to approach each attendee
7. Reminder to keep ‘eyes wide open’ and ‘ears attuned’ to see and hear what to do
8. Clear instruction that staff should spend minimum time talking with each other.
9. And what else?

Suggested reading about networking:

<http://www.businessknowhow.com/tips/networking.htm>

<http://elitedaily.com/money/importance-networking-staying-connected-successful-career/>

<http://www.girlsguidetopm.com/2014/07/6-reasons-why-networking-is-important/>

<http://thethrivingsmallbusiness.com/what-are-5-advantages-of-professional-networking/>