



IS YOUR COACHING NET WORKING?

—Suzi Benoff

Networking is an over-used buzzword today. You've attended networking events that allow the forum for flesh-pressing and sales-smiling and card-collecting. That's not what I'm talking about. Let's explore if you're building your coaching practice by net-working or net-not-working.

Think of it as a virtual net with strands similar to a spider's web. This net reaches out and connects you to many people. Take an honest look at the people in your net. What have you done for them? How much do you know about what they are up to in their lives? Examine the strands of your net to make sure the threads are strong, knotted at the intersections for reinforcement, forming a solidly inter-connected system.

These nine mindsets of networking will allow you to constantly strengthen the strands of your web. The trick is to have all these principles operating together as a system. The recipe won't work if you leave out even one of these ingredients.

1. Networking is ongoing. Start with who you know and find out who they know. Follow up on every lead, be persistent, and ask everyone around you for referrals. Action, action, action: make calls, "do lunch," send e-mail or faxes, mail articles that might be of interest, follow-up with disciplined rigor.

2. Become driven to find connections. As a connection-seeker, look for ways you can connect people to each other. Operating from this drive allows you to see patterns and connections you might otherwise miss. Every person, every interaction, and every moment presents opportunities to link people.

3. Look for mutual benefit. Seek how you can serve people. It's the age-old concept of "givers gain." If you look for what you can do for (or give to) others, it will eventually all come back to you.

4. Keep agendas clearly communicated. Pull no punches. Hidden agendas cause disconnects. Say everything there is for you to say in every conversation. Tell the truth. Risk raising the level of

communication to the most open, safe place possible.

5. Nothing is a wasted interaction. Do not assume that just because there is no fit between your services and the person you're talking to that the interaction is wasted. It may play out for you months (or years) down the road. You never know where the opportunities are, so keep your options open.

6. Everyone is on the squad! Don't rule anyone out as a waste of your time. Follow up on every suggestion people in your net give you. The grocery store clerk may have an uncle that could use your services.

7. Curiously seek what's possible. Look for the win-win in every conversation. If a person is not client material, perhaps they could contribute to your book, serve as a referral source, or perhaps a joint venture potential exists. Engage in conversations for possibility.

8. Stay open, stay in the game of it. Constantly seek new options, have many

irons in the fire at once, and remember the importance of follow-through. Every moment is an opportunity for building or strengthening a relationship. Have fun and enjoy yourself. Networking is not a spectator sport.

9. People want to help you in your endeavor. Let them. If you operate from this mindset, it gives you the freedom to accept the help people offer and to boldly request their help when you need it. Folks love to know they are making a difference by helping you out. Include them and they will include you.

Dive into your net with the above principles and your net will soon be working for you. Happy Net Working!

Suzi Benoff, a leadership development consultant and owner of Innovative Leadership International in Maryland, coaches executives and teams in visioning, team communication, diversity education, strategic planning, powerful presentations, conflict resolution, and effective meeting facilitation.



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