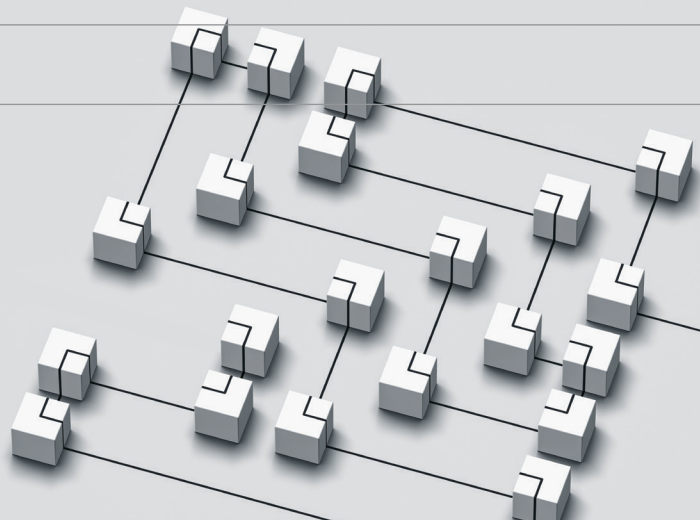


Master Networking in a Way That Works for YOU

By Patricia Romboletti



As marketers and business developers, you understand that networking is vital to your career and firm success.

Curating and cultivating a network that works is an essential part of a strategy I call bulletproofing your career ... for LIFE.* This enables you to be successful in your current role, pivot or move up in your career, and find the next right role.

As an executive career coach, when I raise this topic with new clients, many say they don't have time, or state they just don't like to network. And the next thing I usually hear is "and besides, I'm an introvert—it's very hard for me to network." I'm not surprised this comes up so often, because most of the population are either introverts or ambiverts (a combination of introvert and extrovert personalities). In fact, an estimated 70% fall into one of those two categories.

My counsel to my clients is the same that I want you to hear: It isn't that they aren't good at networking, but rather they aren't networking in a way that works best for them. What holds most people back when it comes to networking is the belief that they need to network in a way that isn't natural for them, but that's the exact opposite of the truth.

To be great at networking, aka, someone who is good at building personal relationships, you really need to do what's natural for YOU. And when you do that, you'll remove your resistance to networking.

Networking Misconception #1: I'm Not Good at Networking

This may surprise you, but introverts are far better at true networking than

extroverts. I believe true networking is really relationship building—not shaking hands, trading business cards, and calling that a network. In actuality, that's a database, not a network.

Introverts have the exact qualities needed to be great at building relationships. They're good listeners, and naturally and authentically inquisitive. Those two qualities alone enable them to build rapport and, in the process, build good relationships.

To quote Dale Carnegie, author of the classic book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, "You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years trying to get them interested in you."

I would make one change to Carnegie's tip by adding the word genuinely: "You can make more friends in two months by becoming genuinely interested ... " In short, be more genuinely interested than interesting and you'll be well on your way to creating a network that works.

You're not born a great networker—no one is. This is a skill that can be developed, just like any other skill you've acquired, from riding a bike to playing a sport or any of the myriad of skills you use every day in your work.

Psychologists have defined the learning model for gaining a skill as the "confidence/competence loop." Here's a simple explanation:

In a nutshell, what this means is simply that when we become better at something, we gain confidence, and when we gain confidence, we become even better at doing that thing. The



The **CONFIDENCE/COMPETENCE LOOP** = If we **BELIEVE** we can do something (**CONFIDENCE**), we'll take action to do it, which increases our **COMPETENCE**.

Increased **COMPETENCE** leads to increased **CONFIDENCE**, which allows us to take more action—and the loop continues!

foundation of this principle is that you must first take one action, no matter how small, to move forward in the loop. Fear stops us from taking action, but once we move even one step forward, fear starts to dissipate, and the confidence/competence loop begins.

Networking Misconception #2: I Need To Network With Everyone

The next biggest misconception I hear from coaching clients is they think networking is all about connecting with as many people as possible at a meeting or event. Some go so far as to say, "I don't want to be known as a glad-hander."

The "Rule of 250" explains why this is a misconception.

The rule stipulates that every individual on average knows 250 individuals whom they can influence to some extent. According to this rule, if you have a strong relationship with one person, they have the potential to bring you 250 new contacts with the help of their personal network.

If you leave an event having made two new contacts, you've created access to 500 people! Attaining two new contacts is doable for even the most hesitant networker.

How To Set Yourself Up for Success

What does all of this mean in practical terms for you? It means you can develop into a competent and confident networker. It's a skill that you can develop. What's first required is that you take one small step.

And this is where networking in a way that works best for you really comes into play. Understanding yourself and setting yourself up for success in the realm of networking is key.

If you were learning to ride a bike today for the very first time, you wouldn't enter yourself into the Tour de France. You would most likely take it slow and practice on a regular basis away from a crowd. Over time, you might go to a quiet, relatively secluded bicycle path, and eventually

try out more popular/populated paths if you really wanted to become a good cyclist.

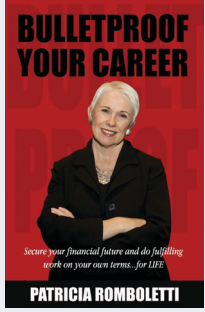
The same process applies to gaining the skill of networking. Let's take a networking event (either live or via Zoom) for example. Start slow, with an event that's more intimate in nature, not one with hundreds of attendees. Then, plan on arriving early, before the room gets crowded. This gives you time to make personal connections in a smaller group. Next, apply the Rule of 250 and aim to connect with just one or two people your first time out. Finally, leave when you've had enough! Just because the event is from 6:00 to 9:00 doesn't mean you can't leave at 7:30!

Once you take the action of going to the event and connecting with one or two people, try going to several events of a similar size. Then you'll be slowly building your competence and confidence. It won't be long until you can eventually attend an event comparable to the Tour de France!

Now it's your turn to build a lifetime network that works. It might take stepping out of your comfort zone, but I think we all know that's where all the magic happens. Just remember those two people you connected with last week can open doors to 500 people. And most important, always remain more genuinely interested instead of trying to be interesting. ■



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***Editor's note:** Learn more in Patricia Romboletti's book, *Bulletproof Your Career: Secure your financial future and do fulfilling work on your own terms ... for LIFE.*



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