



**“I’m at a Networking Event – Now What???”**

**by**

**Sandy Jones-Kaminski**

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## Introduction

I often describe myself as a networking enthusiast and believe that Malcolm Gladwell, author of 'The Tipping Point,' would likely identify me as a "Connector" and a "Maven."

In this book, I wish to illustrate that today's intense social networking environments practically demand that you have at least some knowledge of the best practices and effective tactics of networking, in order to achieve the results you are looking for from this potentially time consuming, yet very worthwhile, part of modern life.

For some, the contents of this book will serve solely as a reminder, but for many, it will offer some valuable insights on what to do, and just as importantly, what not to do while you're out there working hard to maintain good standing within your social networks (online or otherwise), and striving to grow and nurture your own valuable social capital. You'll also learn why you might want to consider becoming a "pay it forward" focused person, as well as how to be more memorable and thoughtful while putting forth all that effort.

And, while today, networking occurs as much online as it does offline (yes, you need to do both), we're not going to differentiate too much in this book, but it's worth mentioning that, as a general rule, it's always best that you don't do or say anything online that you wouldn't in person.

## Let's Talk About Something First...

So, you went ahead and said yes, not maybe, to the invite you received for an upcoming networking event being hosted by your local "insert association/club/vendor name here." You received this invite via a forward from the same friend/mentor/coach/relative/boss who told you that you need to "get out there and network!" in order to find one or more of the following:

- A job
- Leads
- A mentor
- An agent
- A coach
- Recruiters
- New friends
- Clients
- Prospects
- Contacts
- Volunteers

Well, whether you're an extrovert or introvert, there are some best practices when it comes to approaching a networking event in a prepared and focused way. If it makes you feel better, you can call these rules, but whatever you call them, please try your best to mind them because after years of seeing all the ineffective ways people try to network, and simultaneously collect loads of stories regarding the crazy things people will do to get what they want, I knew it was definitely time to put it all in writing and share it with you.

And, coupled with my own motivations, with where unemployment rates are these days, and the record number of people that are out there trying their hand at networking in these desperate times, I'm worried that the effective networkers out there will start a secret society of "power networkers" that will only help each other in the years to come.

Personally, I keep finding proof that the Pareto principle (80/20) applies to networking best practices in general:

Twenty percent of the people truly get it, and then about 80% of folks don't. What I think happens is that the 20% of us are doing the majority of the power networking, and then acting like the "Connectors" (Gladwell/Tipping Point reference) we are, and pretty much doing all the heavy lifting for the remaining 80%. If you are an aspiring power networker you probably think this is great, but I say that's only the case *if* you always want to be in that role, or are a full-time recruiter. I have seen proof that it is also not so good in that we're often only really networking amongst ourselves. I believe that

the goal needs to be that the folks that "get it" must help the 80% out there see the light and continue to help show them the way. This is partly why I wrote a white paper on the topic of networking earlier in 2009 and what led to my writing this book.

## Networking—an Introduction

I realize that I can't dig into this topic without first acknowledging that there exists some general anxiety, which many people feel when merely faced with an invite to a networking event, and in many cases with good reason. Heck, even some of us fearless types can also have that reaction because we have all too often been beyond frustrated with the outcomes of, and behaviors at, many of the networking events we attend.

At gatherings in Chicago, San Francisco, NYC, Silicon Valley, and now Seattle, I have frequently witnessed behaviors from the old "I'm talking to you, but try not to notice my eyes scanning every other person's nametag that walks by please," to the "So, Sandy what's Bella Domain?" And then the eyes glazing over because you, your situation, or words don't immediately appear to be a likely prospect for them. It's no wonder most people experience anxiety!

As many of us know, the joke is quite often on these shortsighted folks because, sometimes while we don't appear to be a prospect, our husband, sister, friend, cousin or co-worker just might be the type of decision maker with whom they really want or need to connect.

Quite a few years ago, I recognized that there had to be a better way to make and cultivate quality connections, so I'd rather unwittingly started taking the "paying it forward" approach to networking. I will attempt to share my knowledge here.

## The Pay It Forward Approach

What's the pay-it-forward approach? Well, thanks to that movie with the kid from Sixth Sense in it, a lot of us understand that the expression "pay it forward" is used to describe the concept of asking that a good deed be repaid by having it done to others instead. What this basically means is that you try to be attentive wherever you are, for opportunities to help someone else. What a novel idea, huh?

Perhaps you have an older co-worker who is too proud to ask for help with the shared login for the company Twitter account, or maybe you're at your company's open house event and see someone who looks like they could really use some insider introductions, hovering just past the entrance to the party. Well, the belief is that by helping either of these folks, you can quite possibly change people's attitudes about at least a little part of their world through your unobtrusive acts of kindness.

My favorite part of all this, and what I attempted to demonstrate at the Pay It Forward (PIF) Parties I've hosted, is that when a person thanks you and wants to "repay" you (that is, pay it "back"), let them know that what you'd really like is for them to pay it "forward"—you'd like them to do something nice for a few other people they don't know (my guests at my PIF Parties, for example), and ask those people to do something nice for a few more people. The idea is to make a conscious effort to increase the goodness of your corner of the world, and networking situations are the ideal environments in which to give it a go.

## The Debate Is Over

There's little debate today that most of us should always be networking, and the truth is most of us actually are. We do it all the time—whether it's at a professional association's luncheon event, at a friend's wedding, at a church gathering, the senior center where we volunteer once a month, or the sidelines of a soccer field. Don't even get me started on how many people make new key contacts at their kids' sports event. (I admit it does make me think hard about adopting some- times!) People can network or connect with others in a long line at the post office or even at the coffee shop you go to every workday. The question is: Are you making the most of your time and the opportunities available to you each and every day?

### **ACTION:**

Over the course of the next week, take note of how many *new* people you encounter. And yes,

seatmates on the bus count!

## What Should You *Not* Do At a Networking Event?

You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.

– Dale Carnegie

### Don't Be a Business Card Commando

If you are a compulsive business card collector, please stop it. Handing out your business card to 50 people you talked to for about thirty seconds each, not only makes you look self-serving and desperate, it also sends off a clear message that you're most likely going to spam people with your newsletter, resume or webinar invites. This means you and your communications are likely to be considered spam and sent to a place that will get you blacklisted in more ways than one. There was a guy in Chicago who did this at practically every event in town and was on so many blacklists that I'd been warned about him repeatedly and weeks before I had even encountered him.

What do you do when you encounter someone like this? If they shove their card at you, go ahead and accept it so that you'll know to keep an eye out for them in the future, but don't feel like you need to give them a card in return. Just smile and say thank you, but if they ask for a card, and you don't want to give them one because you know nothing about them or how you might be able to collaborate with them, just say, "I'm sorry, but I'm almost out and I have another event to go to," —which at some point you will—so smile and move on.

### Don't Be a Hit and Run

Make an effort to stay in touch or in occasional contact with folks you meet with whom you want to stay connected. Make notes on the back of the business cards they've given you about what they need help with or what their interests are. Then try to continue to pay attention to things that matter to them. This is the way to create quality connections and trusted new contacts.

For example, after you have followed up with a new acquaintance, and are now perhaps linked on LinkedIn, when you notice updates or changes in their status, go ahead and message or email them to comment on their change. It might be congratulations if you notice a new job, name change (perhaps they got married) or maybe a promotion. Or, if you know they're looking for a new opportunity or hinted that they would be soon, it might be to offer a suggestion about a good job board you spotted in their field or to connect them to someone new you have met. And, if you see that a contact is traveling or moving to a new town, offer to connect them to whomever you may have a quality connection with there.

Also, be sure to reach out to people when you don't need anything. Networking is about creating, nurturing and building relationships, and they need care and feeding. The whole idea is about not waiting until you need something to build a network; it's about continually cultivating and engaging in that network. The wider your network, the more people you know whom you've worked with. This also implies that all these people know the kind of person you are and the work you do.

#### **ACTION:**

Notice or learn something new about 3 of your current contacts this week. Look at their personal or company website or online activities to see what they're up to and if you can offer encouragement or support or a congrats, do so. Be sincere though; don't just go through the motions!

## Don't Waste Your Time

Remember, have a goal or goals so you don't waste your precious time and energy. Don't go to a networking event unprepared. As mentioned earlier, try to research the types of people who will be there, and the format of the event. Also, focus on making connections of quality, not quantity. It's also just as important to disconnect from the unproductive or overly opportunistic and one-sided networking relationships you'll unfortunately come across. And, for the latter, often, just by association, you could attract more unwelcome attention or unwanted perceptions.

Don't spend any more time on connections you make when you recognize that there's a suspicious or questionable agenda, or they simply aren't reciprocating or paying it forward. Just move on, and whatever you do, don't take it personally. Today's economy has many people coming from a slightly desperate position, and it's best to just forgive their tactics and practice empathy when you can, but you also don't need to let others take advantage of you. Trust your gut and move on.

Like most folks I know, I'd much rather have someone, who's not interested in building a quality connection with me, come right out and tell me they want to meet my brother-in-law (BIL), the head of Engineering at Motorola. It's much better than them stalking my Connections list on LinkedIn, and then trying to reach him by dropping my name during a cold call or email. My BIL, of course, tells me about it, and then I have that person's eyebrow-raising methods reflected on me ("Nice friends, Sandy," he says). Not to mention that they will now likely have my bad mojo out there on them.

Please don't misunderstand. I recommend being an "open networker" in that you are open to helping people get what they are looking for; they just need to tell you what it is first and at least offer a two-way street if they can. I say be happy to connect with people if they manage to build a relationship through the getting-to-know-you process. Just don't let people "leverage" your contacts without your permission or take advantage of your generosity by trying to get for free what you actually charge others for.

### **ACTION:**

Identify someone who is better than you at networking, and attend an event with him or her. And if you really want a good mentor (to your wingman), offer to pay their way to the event. Then watch the way they work the room, and their approaches. You will learn a lot by watching and listening and you won't be any different than the other 80% of people in the room, who aren't totally confident in their networking skills either.

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***[Sandy Jones-Kaminski](#) is a self-described networking enthusiast and accomplished business development professional. In 2002, Sandy launched her own partnership marketing and biz dev strategy consulting practice called [Bella Domain, LLC](#). She is also a recent VP of Networking for one of the largest chapters of the American Marketing Association and author of the book, "I'm at a Networking Event--Now What???" Sandy knows how to make quality connections, cultivate relationships, host some great networking events, and create what she refers to as good "social capital." Read the rest of her book and you'll learn why you might want to consider becoming a "pay it forward" focused person, as well as how to be more memorable while you're out there working hard to maintain good standing within your social networks (on-line or otherwise). You can connect with her at [www.belladomain.com](http://www.belladomain.com) ([sandy@belladomain.com](mailto:sandy@belladomain.com)) and buy her new book via [Amazon](#).***