

Do You Consciously Forge Connections?

A few weeks ago, I picked up my 5 year old daughter from school. The routine is always the same: I ask if her seatbelt is on, wait for the sugary sweet “yes, Daddy,” then ask her to tell me about her day. She replied that it had been a good day, though she had encountered a bit of a problem during playtime when a classmate had the toy she wanted. Curious as to how her creative mind had devised a solution, I asked her what she did. She had told the boy that if he gave her the toy, she would play with him the next day!

“So did you get it?” I asked.

“Of course, Daddy,” she said with a roll of her eyes, clearly exasperated by the fact that I didn’t trust in her negotiation skills.

That’s exactly what it is, too, a simple matter of “trust.” The classmate let her have the toy because he trusted—perhaps a bad move on his part—that my daughter would return the favor. As long as my daughter played with the boy the next day, future sharing would occur. If she failed to keep her end of the bargain, though, the repercussions could be steep: her relationship with the boy could be jeopardized, as could her reputation with the rest of the classmates. Clearly trust and reciprocity play a big part in our everyday lives, whether we are 5 or 55.

We are constantly trusting and reciprocating, often only subconsciously. Perhaps we slow down to offer space to a merging car on the highway or receive a hand from a stranger as we step from a slippery curb. Networking is all around us, we need only to pay attention to our opportunities and take advantage of our resources. After all, if a five year old can master it...

As always, you’re invited to send feedback and article ideas for future issues to newsletter@flowork.com. Have a productive networking month!

John-Paul Hatala, Ph.D., Flowork Founder



This month’s FlowTIP:
*Consciously think
about networking.*
See page 3 for more information.

What’s New?

Network Manager Solutions Wheel

Now you can walk through the networking process by answering simple questions to propel you forward. The Solutions wheel guides the user through 6 stages of the networking process. If they can answer yes to the questions, the wheel prompts them to move to the next stage. An easy to use and interactive tool for turning social capital into social income! You can purchase the Wheels for 1 for \$8.95 or 3 for \$19.95, plus shipping and handling. If you’re interested, please email us at wheel@flowork.com to order yours today.



Don’t Miss Flowork TV!

Flowork will be offering short video segments (two to five minutes) by founder Dr. John-Paul Hatala on topics relating to social capital development. Visit www.flowork.com to view the latest video. If you have suggestions or questions that you would like answered, please email them to floworktv@flowork.com.



Have you checked out the website for *The Game of Networking: The Board Game*? Housing complete information on playing the game, downloadable instructions and online ordering, the site is located at www.gameofnetworking.com

Social Networking Websites *Is There a Point?*

There are likely more than a thousand different online social networking websites out there. From the online forum for horror movie buffs to a site designed for individuals learning to cook, these virtual gathering places span a vast array of topics. No matter your need, there is surely an online community of people there to support you.



So why do people gravitate to the sites? Why do they continue to use them? Better yet, when is the last time you logged on to a social networking website?

These are interesting questions. The 140 million members at Facebook certainly add up to an incredible number, but the real question is, just how many of those members are actively using the site?

Now more than ever before in the history of the world, networking has become not only acceptable from a local perspective but from an international one as well. It is possible to log on to a social networking website and connect with individuals halfway around the world. People are signing up in droves to communicate with others, many of them thousands of miles away and often with experiences, cultures, and lifestyles just as distant.

But what's the point of doing this in the first place? This question needs to be examined a little more closely.

It's obvious that people are using the websites. Facebook alone reports over 140 million users worldwide. Site members are able to perform simple searches leading to the reconnection with individuals with whom they may not have connected in decades. Photos are easily shared and instant updates keep friends abreast of daily activities. John, for example, updated his page fifteen minutes ago and is now working out at the gym, while Beth typed on Monday that she is anxious to pottytrain the mischeivous toddler whose photo adorns her main page.

It's likely you've already seen these networking features or heard about them from friends or family. In many cases you're utilizing them yourself as it is.

You could say, then, that at the core of it is our need to keep our contacts abreast of what we're doing. Perhaps it is done to ignite discussion or maybe you wish to solicit some advice or support. And for many of us, the need stops right there. It's nothing more than a means of saying, "this is what I'm up to."

For others, though, the effort requires a little more reward than that. In order for them to continue their use of these virtual worlds, they need to see a return on their status updates, to receive replies to their comments, to find the support they sought. Otherwise, like everything else, they cannot benefit from the site's true potential.

Usage statistics are unfortunately hard to come by. The easiest to locate come from Second Life, a virtual world of avatars, which claims only 980,000 of MySpace's 16 million registered users accessed the site in December of 2008.

If we compared the virtual networking world to real-life networking activities (the networking event at a trade show conference, for example) there would be a stark contrast. On one hand, committing to attending an event, then meeting people in person requires a very different — often much more productive — approach than logging onto a website. It is a slower process, requires a higher level of confidence, and always brings with it the possibility of rejection.

On the other hand, no one can argue the fact that logging onto a social networking website is much more efficient than going to a live event. It takes less time, more people can be reached (sometimes with only a click of a mouse), and the possibility of rejection is dispersed and has less impact on our egos.

There are a number of differences between virtual and face-to-face networking, yet at the same time they do share a lot in common. But at the core of each activity lies the same networking process. We take advantage of the websites because it seems to easy and we avoid face-to-face networking because it's more difficult. If we start to bring both of these activities to a conscious level and make an effort to connect what we hope to accomplish with people in our lives, the point of the virtual and real world starts to make a lot more sense.

So there is an ultimate *point* to social networking websites, we just need to better evaluate their value and learn how to truly harness it. After all, it's always wise to build your list of available and useful resources, and logging into the virtual world has the potential to connect us with an unlimited number of people who can provide those resources.

Most Of Us Are Networking *And We Don't Even Know It!*

What is networking and how do we define it? The most typical definition is the sharing of information and resources between different people. There are two main forms of networking: *formal*, like online social networking websites or professional networking associations, and *informal*, like bumping in to someone at the grocery store or meeting a contact for coffee.

The term networking is thrown around a lot in today's world. Career experts, for example, feel that networking is an important part of the job search. Small business owners know the operation of a successful business depends on their ability to network. As residents of a community, we want to ensure the safety and beauty of the streets around us, so we gather with our neighbors, just another network. There's a number examples of networking out there and all of them link us to a common definition: it's about relationships and the sharing of information and resources.

If this is the case, why call it networking? We do that every day, don't we? Why not just call it part of living?

Networking is much bigger than the simple act of going out and connecting with someone (though that's certainly important). Networking is a phenomenon that occurs throughout our daily lives. This can be difficult for some individuals, especially when we think of it in a more formal way.

To dig deeper into the phenomenon of networking, we need to look at the concept of the term *relationship*. Most people in the field would claim that the key to networking is to develop long-

lasting, mutually beneficial relationships. Of course this is true, but what we don't discuss is that there is a cost to developing these relationships. Establishing a strong relationship takes time and, let's face it, time is money.

And we must also be sure, too, that the individual actually wants to have a relationship with us to begin with. The fact that we reach out to someone does not mean they will reach back.

Are most of our relationships built on the concept of utility or transactions? In all likelihood, the number of weak ties is almost always greater than our strong ties. If this is the case, it's important to build our interaction with others on a foundation of trust. After all, if people trust us, they're more likely to help us.

Subconsciously, we trust someone will return a favor when we provide them with assistance. If they don't, we'll likely refuse them help in the future. This phenomenon occurs continuously, at any time and any place. A child may help his classmate spell a word, trusting that they might one day return the assistance with a needed math solution. A stranger may assist you in picking up a dropped bag of groceries, trusting that he would get help if he were in the same situation. This is networking, and it's something we do all the time without even realizing it.

The best approach in teaching networking is to focus individuals on the last time they offered help to someone. Why did they do it? Shift the focus, perhaps, to the last time they received help.

What transpired? Likely they will describe a typical networking encounter, reinforcing the idea that we're networking all the time and don't even know it.

It is when we become more aware of it that we may get better. Once you become a better networker, who knows what can happen!



This Month's flowTIP:

Consciously think about networking. When we completely think something through, we generally have a better perspective on what we're actually trying to do. This holds true for networking as well. If we bring networking to a conscious level, we can start to consider the potential resources that exist within them. More specifically, we can start to attach the people we know to the goals we are trying to accomplish. The next time you require assistance to build a fence, start your car or shovel the snow, take a look at your mental networking Rolodex and see if you know anyone who can help you. If you don't know anyone, move on to the next level: think about an individual who might know someone that can help you. Bringing this simple process to the conscious level may help you accomplish your goals more effectively and efficiently.

Online Connections

Socializing on the 'Net isn't just for kids anymore

From *The Sedalia Democrat* • By Sarah Nail • January 17, 2009

It's not just for twenty-somethings and pimple-faced teens.

Online social networking sites such as free sites Facebook and MySpace have transcended generations. More and more, parents and grandparents are jumping on board with social networking profiles.

A study published in January 2007 by the Pew Internet & American Life Project showed that more than half of all online American teens ages 12 to 17 use social networking sites. That figure has likely grown since the Pew study was published.

Tens of millions of Internet users have social network profiles, where they can connect with other users through messages, sharing pictures, posting videos and creating blogs.

Older adults seem to like the social networking sites for the same reasons younger generations do — checking in with friends, making new ones and reconnecting with people they've lost touch with or only see once a year. Some have found they can communicate better with teens by logging onto a site.

Lee Wagenknecht, 50, of Sedalia, created a Facebook profile last year to "know what's going on" with members of his church youth group.

"I found out that's how they kept up with one another," he said.

Wagenknecht has also reconnected with Smithton High School classmates now living in Detroit and Kansas.

"There's been a few of them; now I know where they are and what they are doing," he said.

Ruth Dale, 57, of Sedalia, joined Facebook just last week and heard from a classmate she hasn't seen since 1970. Dale said she "had no idea where she was living" and didn't know her friend's married name.

"It would have been virtually impossible to find her, but within the first few hours I was on Facebook, she responded," Dale said.

The two exchanged information about their families and shared pictures.

"We know how to get a hold of each other now," Dale said.

Dale is more familiar with Classmates, a social networking site with more than 40 million registered accounts. Classmates is geared toward high school graduates. Dale, who is a Sedalia School Foundation board member, said Smith-Cotton High School graduates often think the foundation is connected to the social networking sites.

"A lot of times, S-C graduates go to one of those programs and they think they are hooked into us, and they aren't," she said.

Dale said she likes belonging to Facebook and Classmates because it's fast and easy to find friends, and users can send messages to multiple people at once.

Users can also find out birthdays and important happenings in the lives of their family and friends by looking at their profiles. Wagenknecht said he likes managing his social network online.

"It really lets me find out in five minutes everything that's important," he said.

Why are older generations boarding the social network bandwagon?

Wagenknecht said he thinks his generations' children "have the cyber gene" and "we just tend to come in a little later." The teens and twenty-somethings were early adopters of technology, some of whom are without notions of communicating without the online social networks, Wagenknecht said.

"My generation, we wrote letters and sent e-mails," he said. "Now we're finding out there's a better way."

Vickie Embree, 52, of Sedalia, said she thinks use has increased among her peers because "more and more, our generation is becoming comfortable with the Internet and computer usage."

"Obviously, it was created for the college age, but there's a lot more 40-plus folks that are taking advantage of it," she said.

Embree, who has 87 Facebook "friends," created her profile several years ago.

"Another friend my age was talking about it, and it was just entertaining to see who was on there and what was going on, and the different conversations on there," she said.

Embree said she uses Facebook to keep in touch with distant friends, exchange photos and make contact with relatives she would typically see once or twice a year.

"It's just a quick way to say hi when you don't have a whole lot of time for a long conversation or you don't have a lot to share...somehow it seems like Facebook is quicker and you can see more people at one time than sending e-mails and responding back and forth like that," she said.



Flowork offers the benefits of social capital to anyone of any age. The Education Flowork Program offers educational institutions (Kindergarten through higher education) to ensure their students, faculty and staff become aware of the power of information by networking. Corporate Flowork and the Flowork Workforce Development Program introduces corporations, non-profit organizations, government, and workforce development groups to ways they might increase the flow of information between individuals, departments, divisions and units. Floworks founder Dr. John-Paul Hatala is available for speaking engagements nationwide. If you are interested in booking him for an on-site speaking engagement, please call us at 1-877-flowork or visit www.flowork.com and click "contact us" to discuss your needs.



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