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The Jungle



The Jungle: X's and O's Help Illustrate How Networkers Should Work a Room

By **KRIS MAHER**

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Networking Playbook

When Massachusetts Institute of Technology senior lecturer Ken Morse draws X's and O's on a blackboard, he isn't diagramming football plays. He's illustrating a tactical approach to networking: how to win at working a room.

He boils down the effective playing field -- a room at any business gathering -- to the essentials of a table containing nametags, a bar and a buffet table.

The O's in Mr. Morse's playbook represent the engineering and M.B.A. students in a seminar he leads as head of M.I.T.'s Entrepreneurship Center. His first piece of advice, represented by an O with a slash through it: Don't block the bar. "I would never hire or talk to a bar hog," he says.

He believes more auspicious locations are "at the end of the food table, where people are grazing, or under a light in a spot where the traffic pattern makes sense."

Positioning isn't everything, however. Mr. Morse also recommends networkers have a one-minute "elevator pitch" ready that describes their distinctive competence. "Basically, you are arming others with the case for why you should be hired," he says.

His seminar students practice selling themselves to each other. They also role-play to polish their skills at making informal introductions.

Practicing introductions is key,



Mr. Morse says, because "people need to get smoother and less self-conscious about saying something nice ... without undercutting the statement with an inadvertent snicker or downbeat note."

Kevin McLellan, an M.B.A. student who has just completed his first year, already has used some plays he learned during Mr. Morse's class this spring. At a mid-May VIP reception for a campuswide competition for budding student entrepreneurs, he positioned himself in an outdoor tent and looked for a chance to meet corporate sponsors. He approached the food table to talk with an executive from Intel Capital, Intel Corp.'s investment group. "We kind of had a bite, and we chatted," he says. "What do you know? It works."

Getting Started

The biggest misconception about networking is viewing it as a short-term tactic that's only necessary during a job search, experts say. "The real payoff comes over time and when you're not such a supplicant," says Kate Wendleton, head of the Five O'Clock Club, a national career-counselling organization based in New York.

You can always create a network through classic methods such as contacting your family, friends and college alumni association, joining industry groups and attending business events.

But you may network more effectively with people you run across every day. "Don't let anybody tell you that you've got to golf or sail to be a good networker," says Johanna Schlegel, editor in chief at Salary.com Inc., an online career site. "You should be networking all the time."

Ben Dean, chief executive of MentorCoach.com, which trains therapists to be executive and professional coaches, urges truly ambitious individuals to start an e-mail newsletter with a global reach. "It's like networking on steroids," says Mr. Dean, whose own such newsletter has generated fan mail from as far away as Kazakstan.

Success Story

Friends call Andrea Nierenberg "the queen of networking."

For good reason. The independent business consultant and founder of New York-based Nierenberg Group Inc., says she writes three notes a day to one client, one friend and one prospect. She maintains a database of 3,000 contacts, mailing each the Nierenberg Report, a quarterly newsletter about presentation and management skills. She attaches a personal note to all 3,000 copies.

Ultimately, it isn't how many people you know that counts, but how many you have helped and know you well enough to recommend you.

With such networking, opportunity can knock almost anywhere -- even in the dentist's chair. About a year ago, "I was waiting for my Novacaine to settle in," recalls Ms. Nierenberg, "when my dentist ran in and said, 'You have to meet the client in the next [treatment] room.'" Her dentist, who had received numerous patient referrals from her over an 18-year period, was now happy to return the favor.

The dentist introduced Ms. Nierenberg to a Wall Street executive. It took about six months before she landed consulting assignments at that woman's firm, she says. "But now, I have four projects with them."

Networking Game Plan

Tips for networking at informal business events:

"Get there early and thank your host."

"Get drinks for people who are having a good conversation."

"If you're bored and feel trapped ... find somebody the person would enjoy speaking to."

"If you feel awkward, go with somebody who's not and ask them to help you out."

"Be nice to everybody, you never know."

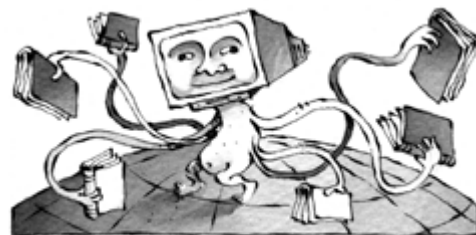
Source: Ken Morse, managing director of the MIT Entrepreneurship Center at the Massachusetts Institute

Help Wanted

Library-Services Official Is Sought

Ingenta Inc. is perusing resumes to find a vice president of global library services.

The three-year-old company, whose name comes from the Latin for "vast," provides online or actual access to more than 25,000 scholarly journals. Customers typically are private libraries associated with universities, corporations and medical institutions. The



Sergio Ruzzier

company lists 4,500 electronic journals that can be delivered to customers' desktop computers.

The vice president will also work closely with the concern's two offices in England, says Carol Woolf, a human-resources consultant for Ingenta. The new hire will be based at the company's U.S. offices in Cambridge, Mass., and earn a six-figure salary, according to Ms. Woolf.

- **What kind of experience should the ideal candidate be able to cite?** "We're looking for somebody who has strong library relationships, who is strongly technical and is able to lead the sales team."
- **Are you looking to hire a librarian?** "I would say for this position, they really need to come from a firm that has sold to the library market. ... This person has to come in and maintain long-term relationships with librarians. [Librarians] have to trust you and trust your product and know that it's really sound."
- **Are the offices quiet?** "Yes, they really are. We have a few librarians on staff, but that's not why. ... It's just the type of environment. It's quiet, but fun."
- **How much information will the VP have at his or her fingertips?** "Everything that we have."

-- Kris Maher

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