

Talk Too Much.

The Power of Networking

By Sarah Khallad

I remember getting my grade six report card as if it were yesterday. I lived across the street from my elementary school so I made sure to stop long enough to have a look before showing it to my parents. I was a pretty good student and so I casually glanced through everything, counting all my “excellent” marks, when three words jumped right off the page at me. Talks. Too. Much. My heart sank and I knew I was in trouble. Big Trouble.

As the old saying goes “I wish I knew then, what I know now.” Perhaps if I had known the definition of ‘networking’ or the power and knowledge that can come from engaging in such activities, I could have avoided the scolding altogether. The definition of ‘networking’ is quite simplistic- ‘making of ties or acquaintances (especially for professional support or business advantages).’ It can and has been expanded to more complex definitions such as this one from Dave Clarke of NRG Networks- ‘Effective business networking is the bringing together of like minded individuals who, through relationship building, become walking, talking advertisements for one another.’

Throughout junior high and high school, the trend continued, only instead of comments on my report card, I generally got detention for once again, talking too much. Little did I know that my extroverted personality would be the essential ingredient leading me on a successful journey as an entrepreneur. When asked to write an article, I wanted to focus on what one thing has made the most difference in my business success. Again and again, I kept coming to the conclusion that it was not the tangible skills. It wasn’t necessarily the financing or the press coverage (although helpful), but instead the generosity of people and a willingness to share gold nuggets of wisdom.

I started my business as a photography major in my 4th year of ACAD (Alberta College of Art and Design). This translated into zero business experience. This meant I had to network in order to search for people who could help and guide me, do some hand holding but mainly ‘kick my butt’ into gear to fully apply myself.

CYBF provided me with start-up financing and a mentor, which was a great first step and a necessary one. More than that, my mentor provided access to her network of professionals and friends who were as enthusiastic about my venture as my mentor. I didn’t know how to write a business plan, so I found a business agency with advisors who were willing to guide me through the process. I was unaware that I was supposed to keep my receipts and bank statements. I ended up finding an accountant who taught classes. Without business knowledge and training, it became clear there were many things I didn’t know. What I knew was that I needed help and I wasn’t afraid to leave my comfort zone, meet new people and ask questions.

So what is my advice? Talk. Too. Much. Get out there and talk. Talk to everyone. Talk to friends and friends of their friends. Be yourself because you never quite know when a weakness might become a strength. For me, I became a great networker!

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