

THE CORPORATE LADDER: The Bamboo Ceiling

DIVERSITY

WOMAN

July / August 2008

Leadership empowerment for women who mean business

20
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Accelerate
12 Steps to Strengthen Your Network

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FABIO CAMARA

Brazilian-born Fabio Andre Camara (cover photo), has been shooting everything from products to international celebrities for 12 years. Camara, who is both a photographer and a

videographer, launched his company his senior year in college and built his first studio in 1999. Camara has traveled the globe on assignments, as his timing and creative eye gives his images an international appeal.

"I strive to create images, not just shoot pictures. A picture stops you, but an image moves you. A picture grabs your eye, but an image grabs you by the heart. The real beauty in art is to create an image without having to manipulate anything. Take for instance, this photo [at right]. After shooting Sheila Johnson for the Diversity Woman cover, the crew and I were packing up, and I saw these dogs playing and immediately spotted the image. I quickly grabbed a camera and fired about five shots. It was too funny to let pass. The juxtaposition of the horse's large head against the tiny Chihuahua is a great image in itself. Then add in the way it looks as if the horse wants to join in the fun—almost like a parent watching kids on a playground—made it a priceless shot."



JENNY MERO

Jenny Mero (On the Money, page 59) is a reporter at *Fortune* magazine, where her subjects have ranged widely—from politics in Latin America to landmine issues. She is also a contributing writer for several publications, including *Essence* and *Selecciones*, where she tackles personal finance and human interest articles.



KIMBERLY OLSON

Kimberly Olson (cover feature, page 34) is a San Francisco-based freelance writer who has long had a passion for issues that affect women. She has written about everything from breast cancer breakthroughs to a concept car designed especially for women. Her stories have appeared in *Entrepreneur*, *Equity*, *Design for Living*, *San Francisco*, and *Napa Sonoma* magazines, among other publications.



PATRICIA WITKIN

Patricia Witkin (Accelerate, page 29) is a San Francisco-based freelance writer and consultant who has written extensively about the role of technology in running all aspects of a business, including interactive marketing and public relations, small business challenges, web development, and social networks.



JANE HYUN

Jane Hyun (The Corporate Ladder, page 17), founder of Hyun & Associates, is an executive coach and multicultural leadership strategist to Fortune 500 companies and top MBA programs. She is the author of *Breaking the Bamboo Ceiling: The Essential Guide to Getting In, Moving Up, and Reaching the Top*. Her work has appeared on CNN, CNBC, NPR, and in *Time*, *Fortune*, *Working Mother*, and *Crains*.





How to Win Friends and Influence People

Dale Carnegie knew what he was talking about. Here's why networking is a must-have skill and how you can master it.

BY PATRICIA WITKIN

EVEN THE MOST CAPABLE businesswomen rely on the contributions of trusted associates to reach their goals. People do business with people they know and like.

Angela Ford, founder and CEO of TAG Worldwide, a Chicago-based firm focused on sustainable property management, puts it simply: "Networking is about making friends."

Before you grab a stack of business cards and rush out the door, it's important to understand what networking is not. When Ford was starting out in her career, she believed—like many neophytes—that networking meant "telling you all about

what I'm doing. But that's one-sided and not at all what it's about."

Networking isn't the same as promoting yourself and your business. It's not even about meeting new people and learning what you can do for each other. It's primarily about listening to the people you meet and figuring out what they want to accomplish—and how you can help them.

"If I'm a short person, and your goal is to get something off a shelf, you might think I can't help," Ford explains. "But if I'm strong, I can lift you up. Or maybe I can introduce you to my tall brother. If I can help you get it, we've got a bond." And from those bonds, relationships build.

ACCELERATE

Bonita Jones, who recently retired after nearly 30 years with the Federal Reserve Bank and is a board member of the American Bankers Association, agrees. "Integrity is the foundation of all networking efforts," she says. "If you have that, people will always come to you."

Want to become a world-class networker? Here are 12 techniques to mastering this all-important art.

Be Prepared

1 When you're living and breathing your business every day, you certainly know how to talk about it, right? Maybe, but maybe not. You need to develop a concise, one-sentence elevator pitch—maybe even several versions tailored to different audiences. "It should be your slogan," says Ford. "If you don't know what you're trying to do, I can't help you."

Take the Long View

2 Networking doesn't often yield immediate results—although it can, with fortuitous timing and good luck. For the most part, though, you should



approach networking as a long-term enterprise. It takes time to gain trust and nurture relationships. "You're making deposits in the bank, building up capital so you can make a withdrawal when you need it," says Jones.

Stop, Look, and Listen

3 As TAG's Ford learned, networking is about listening. Make sure you're giving others the opportunity to speak. Ask follow-up questions that show you're interested. Shake hands, make eye contact, engage, and interact. Repeat names when you meet new people if that will help you remember them. Don't turn the encounter into a sales pitch.

And have empathy, says Jones. You never know what common ground you might discover that will come back to be helpful later—for either of you. That's another value you provide as an effective networker: You bring a fresh perspective and an objective viewpoint when you listen to other people and offer support and ideas that help them get where they want to go.

'Tis Better to Give

4 I'm always on the give," says Ford. She's gotten to know what her friends want to accomplish and vice versa. When she hears about an opportunity that might be appropriate for one of them, she networks on their behalf. Her core group tosses leads and contacts back and forth to each other all the time. "If you do it on the give first, there's a decency that begets gratitude," Ford says.

Don't forget to maintain those contacts and leads. You don't keep in touch with your friends only when you need a favor, right? The same holds true



in professional networking, according to Jones. Even if nothing concrete has been established to necessitate further dialogue, she suggests you e-mail or call your new contact just to say hi and see how business is going. Suggest a lunch or coffee date, and then show you were listening by referencing your last conversation or by sharing links to relevant news articles.

Location, Location, Location

5 You're a busy entrepreneur who can barely get away from the computer to grab lunch, but you need to fit networking into your routine. Put yourself where your industry's leaders and influencers are—often conferences and affinity groups—to become a familiar face.

Eventually, you'll need to get away from the convention center. Ford shares a story from her greener days when she was the affirmative action officer at a large property management firm. She expected to throw open the floodgates and find no shortage of minorities anxious to submit proposals. "I was still unpolished, so I'd stand up and say, 'I don't know you! My cell phone number is printed on my card; why haven't you called?' Then I realized that I'd never made the effort to go to their party or golf event." She learned that, if you want to do business with someone, you have to be where they are.

Play the Part

6 Appearances count. Dress comfortably but appropriately for the occasion, so you're not preoccupied by tight shoes or a revealing blouse. At cocktail parties, watch your alcohol intake and avoid messy, cumbersome plates of food that make it hard to mingle and chat. Remember to smile!

Just Like Mom Said

7 Women are natural networkers; we like to chat and meet new people. We also have a

tendency to get into each other's personal business. Networking resembles interviewing for a job more than making new friends. Frame comments in a positive way and avoid bad-mouthing other companies, people, or products. It's natural to share personal information when you're making small talk, but don't gossip. Try to stick to neutral topics. Jones follows advice her mother gave her: Keep your business to yourself and be careful what you share. When in doubt, keep the personal stuff quiet.

"Don't burn your bridges" is another time-honored mantra mothers have been passing down for generations. Avoid making empty promises or misrepresenting yourself in your quest to win new business contacts. You never know who this person knows or might meet later.

Don't Be Shy!

8 Entering a room of strangers can be intimidating, especially if you're an introvert. Jones shares more sage advice from her mom: Act as if you've got a million dollars in your pocket, hold your head up high, and act like you belong. It may help to arrive early, before people have formed closed groups.

Make yourself approachable. An event planner I know lives by the phrase "fake it til you make it." In other words, act the part that you want to play.

If you're supershy, Ford suggests bringing along a more outgoing friend or colleague to get the ball rolling—and then branch off and make your own way. But don't arrive with an entourage and talk only to them.



Resources

Stand Out

9 As women, we sometimes fear that assertiveness will be interpreted as pushiness. Don't let that stop you. Let your passion show, and don't be afraid to stand out. In the male-dominated construction industry, Ford knows that being the only black woman in the room will get her noticed—which is not a bad thing! "I play every advantage I've got," she says. "If there are a hundred black people in the room, I've got to be the only one wearing green." Whatever it takes, Ford will make you know her and like her. Business, she says, is like a courtship. You've got to get people interested in you and then give them reason to want to see more of you.

Be Organized and Strategic

10 Keep in mind that you can't talk to everyone in the room. Aim for a manageable number of quality contacts. Find out in advance who's attending, so you can use your time to target key influencers. If you've met someone before, you might contact him or her beforehand with a "hope to see you there" note.

Record notes on business cards about whom you met, what they do, what you talked about, next steps discussed—anything you might want to refer to in future interactions. Ford, though blessed with "almost total recall," still jots down notes in the car afterward, then puts them in her Blackberry.

Connect in Cyberspace

11 Countless websites can connect you with colleagues, mentors, suppliers—whatever you need—without having to leave the office. The best-known social networking site is probably *LinkedIn.com*, which lets you search for individuals by industry, employer, location, and so on, and then send messages through the system to start a conversation.

National Urban League—Nation's oldest and largest community-based movement devoted to empowering African Americans

National Business Incubation Association—Leading organization advancing business incubation and entrepreneurship; provides professionals with information, education, advocacy, and networking resources

Center for Women's Leadership at Babson College—Dedicated to the accomplishment of women at all stages of their careers

Dingman Center for Entrepreneurship at the University of Maryland—Forward-looking and community-focused entrepreneurial institute

EntreMate—Online discussion forums for entrepreneurs

United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and African American Chamber of Commerce, as well as your local chamber of commerce

Las Comadres Para Las Americas—Informal Internet-based group that meets monthly in many U.S. cities

Downtown Women's Club—Online social network and in-person community designed for "smart and sophisticated businesswomen on the go"

Wall Street Journal's Career Journal—Features a directory of free or low-cost career-related events

Networking for Professionals—Dynamic business networking organization that powerfully combines online business networking and real-life events

Yahoo! Group (groups.yahoo.com) can also put you in touch with people who share your business and personal interests. You'll also find more specific sites such as *Dogster.com*, whose members span all ages, geographies, and work arrangements but who all share an obsession with their pets. Who knows if that fellow collie lover might also be a potential business contact?

Want to create your own online network? Services such as *Ning.com* put the power in your hands. If your niche lacks a devoted site, you can establish yourself as the ring-leader by creating one.

One caveat: The virtual world should supplement your off-line networking activities, not replace them. You might make connections online, but try to meet your contacts in the flesh. Think ahead about visiting with your online friends when you travel to their cities. Or at least get on the phone for a "real" conversation.

Be Patient

12 It can take a year of crossing paths, recognizing each other at trade shows, and exchanging e-mails before you establish a solid bond with a new contact or see any real impact on your business. All the while, however, you'll be meeting more new people, and doing it "on the give" to ensure that your long-term investments deliver returns.

Ford compares herself to Johnny Appleseed. "If you keep spreading this stuff around, you won't starve. You'll have orchards to pick from. But you've got to do the work. You've got to water it and harvest—but you definitely will eat." **DW**

Patricia Witkin is a San Francisco-based freelance writer and consultant who has written extensively about the role of technology in business.