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Are you networking from the heart?

It might surprise you to know that networking needs to come from the heart – not the head.

If you're a person who's used to using your head for business, this may sound counterintuitive. The truth is, using your head to network means you are too focused on the outcome and not on the relationships you are cultivating. Cultivation is a key concept, as great networkers are farmers not hunters.

Some business professionals go about networking the way our cave-dwelling ancestors went about hunting food – aggressively and carrying a big stick. They're always looking for the next big sale or are constantly trying to meet the right prospect. These people are on the hunt and aren't interested in cultivating real relationships with a range of people during networking events. They don't understand that networking should come from the heart not the head. It's about building relationships over time rather than immediate outcomes.

By changing their attitude, these hunters can become farmers.

Farmers take a different approach to hunters. They don't waste time looking for the right person, they seek to form and build relationships wherever they can find them. Like those who plant seeds and patiently nurture their crops, farmers know that the effort expended upfront will pay off in a rich harvest later on. They don't expect an immediate payoff; instead, they understand that truly profitable relationships can't be rushed – you have to prepare the soil first.

Let me give you a personal example. When I worked as a property valuer in London during

the late 80s property crash, the focus was on hitting my fee target each month. This made it very challenging to look beyond the short term. Management needed to yield quick results; it was a hunting mentality. This made it hard to network from the heart – helping others in a selfless way, rather than thinking 'what's in it for me', and at the same time investing in my social capital. It also meant that the networks I created were not long-lasting and profitable.

Networking is all about farming for new contacts, not hunting them. Some people may take pride in being a hunter, but in today's competitive business environment the emphasis needs to be put on farming. Farmers create strong connections with other business people. They understand about the Law of Reciprocity – that giving means helping others achieve success.

Just thinking about making money doesn't work for businesses in the long term; your customers increasingly expect you to think about your impact on the community, environment and other people.

Social capital is the expected collective benefits that come from cooperation between individuals and groups. Businesses that think about social capital understand that social networks have value. They understand the 'givers gain' philosophy and that if you focus on helping others, you will achieve success in the end.

People do business with other people that they know, like and trust. Trust is the currency of networking and actions speak louder than words. People trust those that engage in philanthropic acts that come from the heart;

this sort of activity says far more about you than you could ever say about yourself – or demonstrate with a clever marketing campaign or splashy advertising. True success takes getting involved – like a farmer getting his or her hands dirty in the rich earth.

To transform from a hunter to a farmer and start networking from the heart you must:

- Change your attitude – don't see networking as something that has to be done or an outcome that has to be achieved; see it as an opportunity to meet, learn about people and strengthen relationships.
- Invest in social capital – don't just think about what you can get from a networking event, think about what you can give.
- Watch other successful business people – learn by emulating others; when you're networking, study how highly successful philanthropic people are operating.
- Be practical and proactive in your networking – don't just move randomly from one networking event to another. Join a proven, professional networking organisation that allows only one person from each profession to join any group or chapter.

As the economy strengthens, there is a danger that people will stop investing time in networking. In fact, this is a critical period in which you should continue your networking efforts – but it's important to network smarter not harder. Business is about friendships and relationships. There's no better vehicle for creating these than through networking.

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