

Develop a Personal Success Story

...and improve your networking

This is the season of parties when we frequently meet new people and talk with people we haven't seen in a year. It is a season of unique personal contact with friends, family, neighbors and acquaintances. This past year, more than others, brought a great deal of change to many of us in our finances, personal life, home life and relationships. The business landscape has irreversibly changed.

Is there any way we can use all of the unique personal contacts this holiday season to network, learn, and grow to better adapt to these changes? Could our friends, family and other contacts really help us adapt to the great changes in our lives?

A good way to manage change in our personal and business lives is through successful networking. Now more than ever this has become a "must-have" capability for those in business. Networking is generally described as a planned process of exchanging information in such a way as to create mutually beneficial results. But at a holiday party?

People are at these seasonal events for different reasons. Some are simple family get-togethers. Other events are purely social and celebratory. With a little forethought, I believe these events can be a great opportunity to meet people and develop contacts as a springboard that can launch us forward. What is your answer when asked by a familiar face "What's new?" And what is your response when asked by a stranger "Who are you, what do you do?"

With some simple planning we can learn to respond to such questions with a *Personal Success Story* that can be told in 1 – 2 minutes. A brief positive story, followed by some genuine interest in the other person, is a great way to engage another person in a conversation that can be mutually beneficial. Think of using this *SUCCESS* story outline.

S Strategic – does the story fit the message I want to convey?

U Unique – why are you different from everyone else

C Clear – not technical but understandable to the person listening

C Concise – don't ramble, stick to one main point

E Enthusiastic – Smile, make it exciting, make it memorable

S Short – should be a quick answer to their question

S Solution- Why did you use this story, did it serve the purpose, convey your message?

As an example, here is a story I could use this holiday season: “I feel just like Oprah announcing that she is changing direction after her long career. She recently spoke with her advisors and came up with a long-range plan that takes her to a new level. I just embarked in a new business too. This year, I spoke with many people about the choices I had. Taking advice from them, I bought a new business, *The Presidents Forum*, which builds on my interests and strengths. Now I help business leaders achieve their success.”

Remember, to have a successful “networking” conversation, it must be mutually beneficial. It is a dialogue not a monologue. After you tell your story, ask the other person a question that shows interest in them. Since many people now are thinking about their future, ask “if you could be like Oprah and change what you are doing, what would you do?” If we truly want this to be a mutually beneficial relationship, we need to help the other person while we get their help.

At a family party last month, I told my nephews about my new venture. One nephew thought his ex-boss would be interested in meeting me. So I followed up and met a great new contact for my business. Thus a family social event led to a valuable business contact. This illustrates why I believe that virtually any social event can lead to personal contacts that can help us learn and grow in business and in life. But to take advantage of these situations, a little planning and forethought are required. With a little practice our success stories can become, not a formula we follow, but a very natural part of our conversations. Not all of us are instinctual networkers but it is a skill, like any other, that can be developed. So take advantage of this holiday season’s many social events to practice this skill!