

McCarthy Strategies
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Charles Darwin and Networking for Success

February 12, is the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin. His book "The Origin of Species" put forth two lasting theories:

Universality of Conflict – all beings are in competition and struggle for limited resources.

Natural Selection –those plants and animals which adapt to a changing environment will be best suited to dominate resources and reproduce.

One Hundred and Fifty years after the publication of Darwin's book, human beings often feel this same way about the struggle for success: survival of the fittest. In spite of some who may argue that Darwin's ideas do not fully apply to the world of business, we all know we work in a highly competitive, constantly changing environment with limited resources and significant conflict. It often feels like a dog-eat-dog world.

The key to achieving goals in our current situation is to work smarter. Networking, done correctly, helps us adapt to this quickly changing environment and achieve a variety of goals, for example:

- ✓ Get a new job
- ✓ Acquire extra business
- ✓ Learn something innovative
- ✓ Open ourselves up to new ideas and possibilities
- ✓ Meet the right people

Interestingly, in surveys of activities that people like most or least public speaking is generally the least liked activity. This distaste for public speaking is closely associated with a dislike of networking. According to Sociologists, most of us don't like the focus to be on ourselves when speaking, especially with strangers. Networking usually involves reaching out to those we do not know well, either one-on-one or in public. That makes us uncomfortable.

How can we overcome this natural fear of networking and make our networking more successful? To attack these issues, I suggest we use the same acronym that business use for success: PAR (Plan, Action, Result).

Plan

- Identify one person who will be your champion to help you succeed with your goals. This person assesses your weekly progress against written goals.
- Recognize upfront what you want the outcome to be, whatever the goal.
- List people to meet or information to obtain, to better prepare in advance for events.
- Use a tool to keep track of contacts, follow-up and successes.

Action

- People do business with people. Go to events; determine other attendees at these events beforehand to help in your planning.
- Plan for success. Have a purpose with three goals for each event you attend.
- Dress and act professionally. Hand out your business card.
- Greet all people you meet with enthusiasm, get their names correct.
- If it is a job you are looking for, instead of a resume use a Networking Hot Sheet with your profile, ideal position and target companies.
- Use Networking web-sites like; LinkedIn, Plaxo, Face Book, My Space

Result

- Advanced your job search or sales prospect forward.
- Gained connections to the right person.
- Obtained pertinent information on contacts, companies & positions.
- Gathered inside information about job leads or new business.
- Secured a meeting with a key individual or decision maker.

Charles Darwin advanced the notion of “survival of the fittest” in evolution. Today that idea has carried over into our thinking about business and political issues. This thinking is prevalent as our government and businesses attempt to beat the recession by enhancing successful programs and terminating unsuccessful ones.

But there are some ways in which Darwin’s ideas may not be helpful in achieving our goals. Darwin’s model implies a zero sum game. His ideas apply best in those situations when resources are finite and limited i.e. when the pie is only so big and only so much to share. But in the business or political world we can often think more creatively to make more opportunities for all. In other words we can attempt to “enlarge the pie” to everyone’s benefit.

So while some may choose, especially in today’s competitive environment, to act as if it is truly a dog-eat-dog world, this mindset may not achieve the best results. Especially in networking it is possible to act in a win-win mode. Networking partners can derive mutual benefit and synergies. It is important we share meaningful information with our networking contacts to establish long standing, mutually beneficial relationships.

So, whether you believe Darwin’s ideas apply fully to your business or not, it is more important than ever in this highly competitive, constantly changing environment to be “out there”, in front of people, influencing and being influenced by others. Networking is a critical skill in today’s world.

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