

Why Women are Such Great Networkers

By Jacqueline Harris from Auric Results Limited. This article is based on a talk I gave to the women's networking group (She Plc) within Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce. My objectives were to boost the confidence of women in their ability to network and also to encourage them to attend mixed networking events.

Whether you are new to networking or experienced, are you getting the results you want? Do you know what you want and do you know what results you can achieve through networking?

I help individuals and businesses to achieve results beyond their dreams. One practical tool for realising your dreams is networking, whether for you that means finding new clients, new suppliers, new ideas or support.

Do any of you just go to women-only networking events? I have mixed feelings about women-only groups. On the one hand, I am not in favour of women-only groups because of not wanting to discriminate between genders. I started my working life in the early eighties in the then male-dominated world of banking, where I was amongst a minority of women. Consequently, I don't want to recreate a mirror image of that environment.

On the other hand, whilst we are all unique individuals, the world of business and commerce has been male led for hundreds – possibly thousands – of years, so women can need extra support to help them succeed in this environment. There are also certain types of events that generally women prefer to men and vice versa – lunch versus golf, perhaps.

I believe that women have the potential to be great networkers. Many are already very successful and others need to understand how to play to their strengths and release their potential. Here, I will highlight the strengths that we have, discuss some of the specific challenges we face that hold us back from realizing our potential and help you to think differently about playing to your strengths.

What do we mean by 'networking'?

First of all let's be clear about what we mean by the term 'networking'. When I first set out on my networking journey, I thought that networking meant attending some sort of event where I would meet people from the business community; we would have a chat; perhaps exchange business cards; and then hope that somehow business would flow from that. I know that many of my clients who come to me for help are approaching networking in that very same way.

What I soon discovered is that that networking is more about developing and nurturing a network of contacts in order to maximise opportunities for oneself and others; so attending events is part of this because meeting people is part of the developing process – but only part.



P Prepare

I have developed a structure to support this which is my PINK approach to networking:

I Invest

– if you want to know more about this then you might be interested in my workshop - “**How to Network Effectively to Achieve Results**” contact me at j.harris@auricresults.co.uk for more information.

N Nurture

What makes women so good at networking?

K Keep

Perhaps there are some clues in my use of the title ‘PINK approach’ and of the word ‘nurture’ which is quite a feminine trait. I believe the key strengths that make us so good at networking are:

- We build rapport well.
- We have great social skills – we have been networking since cave-dweller times. More recently, coffee mornings and Tupperware parties for housewives were early forerunners of networking and support groups.
- We can be good at listening – and listening is more important than talking when networking.
- We take an interest in people which is fundamental to networking (and to selling).
- We can be caring, and potential buyers want to feel cared for.
- We can be giving – I believe that to be good networkers you have to give to receive
- We are natural nurturers nurture.

What underlies these skills is the networking principle that it is about who you know rather than what you know. More specifically, it is about who the people you meet know... and so on.

Each of us has between 250 and 500 contacts and, depending on what research you read, anyone we want to meet is between five and seven contacts away. So let’s say I have 500 contacts and each of them has 250 contacts, that is 125,000 contacts just two steps away.

So what gets in our way and why do we end up at times nervous, embarrassed and frustrated when networking?

First of all, most **strengths can also be weaknesses** if taken to an extreme; someone who is a great listener might listen so much that the person that is talking to them sees them as shy with nothing to contribute. Someone who is very giving will give so much to others and never be available to receive. Someone with great social skills may appear to be interested only in having a good time and not be serious about business. Someone who is very nurturing might feel that by asking one of their contacts for something they might damage the relationship.

...And some of the other main challenges I come across are:

- Not knowing how to network
- Lack of confidence – in self, in business or what they have to offer, in skills
- Fear of standing out (as a woman)
- Fear of the ‘sea of grey suits’
- What do I talk about (to men)?



How do you face these challenges?

Here are my top tips:

1. Play to your strengths.
2. Remember that most people are uncomfortable about attending networking events – men as well as women and the most common questions I am asked my mixed groups are:
 - a. How do I enter the room?
 - b. How do I walk up to someone?
 - c. What do I talk about?
 - d. How do I keep the conversation going?
 - e. How do I move on?
 - f. How do I follow up?
3. You can learn the how from people you know, from watching others, from reading books and from attending workshops like mine.
4. Practice makes perfect – and the more you do something the more confident you will become.
5. Practise by attending women-only events – and then move on to mixed events or you might be missing out on lots of opportunities.
6. Put yourselves in the shoes of men at these events – what might they be concerned about?
7. Standing out is a good thing at a networking event – you will be remembered and that's what you want.

And so some things for you to think about. I set out to look at the strengths we have as women that make us great networkers and how we play to those strengths.

In the words of Marianne Williamson:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, "Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?"

Actually who are we not to be?

... as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.

As we're liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

Let your light shine – **you** are powerful beyond measure.



Photographs courtesy of Carolyn Mansi – carolyn.mansi@waitrose.com