

Keeping Your Network Healthy

By Katie Darden

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In a recent survey, the National Association for Female Executives (NAFE) uncovered some interesting trends in their affiliate networks.

For instance, women who first came to join a NAFE network organization were often just starting out in business or in their careers, and joined because they wanted help in getting started, so they were seeking the knowledge of those who had already succeeded.

After a few years, many of them "dropped out" of membership, actively pursuing their professions, building their businesses, and raising their families.

Then, once the growth, development and acquisition phases were over, many of them come back into membership again as mature, successful business and career women. The focus this time was in wanting to give back to the younger ones who were just starting out. Now that's networking come full circle.

Did you notice, though, that the new and the experienced are taken care of, but the women in the middle - the ones actually making it all happen - are the ones left out?

During a recent Women Entrepreneurs Roundtable session, one of our participants expressed how difficult it can be to remain motivated and fresh as you grow beyond the start-up issues into a mature business.

This is where Mastermind Groups, Advisory Boards, Trade Organizations and Creative Alliances can make a huge difference. Especially when the members have a similar maturity level (in terms of their business) and diverse backgrounds.

One of the most rewarding relationships can be to create your own personal Board of Directors. You bring them together whenever you need. And, their sole purpose is to be there for you - to provide ideas, resources, feedback and support for whatever you bring to them.

Another version of this is to create your own Research and Development (R&D) Team. Whenever you want feedback, ideas, opinions or finetuning of your projects, you contact the group, usually by email, and those who so desire respond. This is more of an individual relationship because unless you create ways for the team to interact, their only contact is with the "owner" of the R&D team.

Genius ideas come from "mixed metaphor" thinking and cross-platform brainstorming. Considering

how someone in a different business or field might handle a situation will give you new ideas for your own business.

As you build your business, always be on the lookout for both formal and informal opportunities to begin to create your own supportive team of "expert" thinkers.

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You can participate with the Women Entrepreneurs Roundtable (a NAFE affiliate network) for the price of a long distance phone call. On the first Wednesday of each month women from the US and Canada gather for an hour on the telephone to discuss issues relevant to women in business. To find out more, go to <http://womens-roundtable.com>

If you are interested in joining an R&D team to see how the experience might expand your own thinking, send an email to <mailto:RDteam@careerlife.net>

Katie Darden is a Business and Career Coach who focuses on highly skilled people who are longing to become their own boss. She provides coaching and teleclasses in starting your own successful business. Find out more at <http://CareerLifeInstitute.com>

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