

Getting Into An Ideal Network: Success Stories You Can Model

By Mary Kurek

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The following are real life networking success stories. These stories are based on my own experiences of positioning within a network to create fabulous opportunities. They are offered here as models for you to review and glean tips and ideas for your own benefit.

THE COMMITTEE

I recently received an email from a friend asking that I consider coming to a meeting to discuss the possibility of producing a film festival in our area. As a Networking Coach for Performers and an actor, myself, I viewed this as an opportunity to expand my network in an ideal setting. It turned out to be amazingly ideal. The meeting, which was held at our local Chamber of Commerce, attracted several people who actually had career interests having to do with the film industry. I handed out business cards upon the close of the meeting and had two phone calls afterward from potential clients. My first task for this committee was to bring in a few others from my network that I knew would be helpful. I brought in a Public Relations Specialist with direct ties to a popular author whose last several books had been made into movies. I also brought someone with extensive experience with another film festival as well as a filmmaker and producer. These are all people whom I knew would benefit from this committee as well. In addition I was asked by the committee to secure a meeting with a film studio executive for advice and potential assistance. I did so, and met with two other committee members in the office of Frank Capra, Jr. on the lot of Screen Gems Studios. It was, needless to say, a valuable meeting for all, and I was subsequently asked to be on the Steering Committee for the Festival. During this time, it happened that the Chamber of Commerce held it's annual membership drive and I joined. The benefits include a television interview and an opportunity to place 1,000 fliers in their newsletter about my business. The most recent meeting of this committee revealed the need to request that the Governor appoint a Film Council representative from our area. Naturally, I have expressed my interest in serving as such. The key thing here is, whether or not I am appointed, I have already revealed myself as a significant resource for the film industry in this area. That alone made this committee an ideal networking opportunity.

THE COFFEE SHOP

There was this tiny little coffee shop in a harbor town that served up flavored coffees by day and wonderful wines by night, often with live entertainment. The shop's quaint atmosphere drew the

strangest mix of highly artistic Bohemian types as well as boat people and even a businessman or two. They were a real network – helping one another through their personal and business lives. Though I was initially drawn for my own enjoyment, I found the environment so magnetic that I invited some of the shop's entertainers to guest on a local television show that I hosted. I also met a remarkable man who owned a 400-pound Bengal tiger named "Tex". I was invited to meet Tex close up one very cold day at the Preserve where he lived...one of the most exciting days I think I can recall. I not only met Tex, but a black panther named Bruce, a Lioness named Lucy and a rain forest creature so rare most humans never get to see one much less hold one. As phenomenal as that connection was, it was the meeting of the Flamenco Guitarist named Paco that would put the label "ideal" on this network. Paco performed occasionally and almost always packed the house. His girlfriend Connie would accompany him acting in the capacity of P.R. manager. When I asked Paco to be a guest on my show, I began developing a friendship with Connie. What was interesting about Connie is that she was at the time a Senior Writer for the only Film Industry Magazine in our state. Maybe a year went by and Connie called me to let me know a director was in town getting ready to debut his first independent feature. She connected me to do a televised interview with the man. It was during the day of that interview that I found myself in exactly the right place for the opportunity to do some acting on a major motion picture. After several callbacks and acting jobs later, I found an agent and thus a small but happily satisfying side career in acting was born. This, as a result of taking advantage of networking in what already felt like an ideal environment.

THE SPORTS LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Sometimes you find an ideal network by attempting to create one for someone else. A few years ago, I founded a leadership program for high school students. It was so successful that I took the model to another community and restructured it with the mission of raising role model athletes. While developing a nonprofit organization for what would be a sports leadership program I began building a network in a field about which I knew absolutely nothing...sports. However, I made connections at levels that were astounding, because my mission had everything to do with helping youth. Drew Pearson (former Dallas Cowboy) Satch Sanders (NBA), Donna Lopiano (Women's Sports Foundation), George Atkinson (former Oakland Raider), Pat Williams (Orlando Magic), Stedman Graham (Athletes Against Drugs), Jerry Butler (Buffalo Bills), Mark Shapiro (Cleveland Indians) and Jerry Stackhouse (at the time with the Philadelphia 76ers) were some of the contacts. Most were surprisingly accessible. I met with sports agents, college basketball coaches and anybody who would listen. Locally, I checked the phone book for a sports manager type and found a listing for TW Enterprises. I called and met the man over coffee at a fast food restaurant. I was sitting across the table from Tracy Williams, former Harlem Globetrotter. We immediately hit it off understanding that we both had a similar desire for young athletes. Tracy introduced me to a businessman who agreed to fund the entire first year's sports leadership program. Since then, Tracy has become a good friend; the businessman has become a mentor for me and serves as the organization's President. Jerry Stackhouse agreed to lend his name to our efforts, and the program has been spotlighted in The Sporting News, an international sports publication. The program is about 7 years old. Participants have met a Nobel prize winning scientist, enjoyed lemonade with our first lady, had a Q & A session with a US Ambassador and had opportunities they would never have had if not for persistence in building a network just for them. In doing so, I managed to create an oddly ideal network for myself; one from which I am constantly reaping the rewards.

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