

Why Lurk When You Can Lead?

By Rozey Gean

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On-line business networking communities are springing up right and left. Scores of entrepreneurs are joining in an effort to exchange among the membership and to utilize these phenomenal cyber groups to grow their businesses.

Unfortunately, a great number of entrepreneurs never reap the full benefits of their membership in these communities because they remain in "lurk" status for whatever reason. The term lurker simply refers to an individual who signs up, receives and reads all of the messages posted to the list or bulletin board, but chooses not to respond or participate.

I know that you may be thinking, "Well, isn't the lurker actually learning from others who do participate?" To a certain extent, the lurker will learn something, even if it is by mistake. However, the lurker will probably never grow his/her business based on effective networking techniques if he/she fails to actively network. By remaining in lurk status, the businessperson fails to become an active participant in the group. The lurker may take advantage of the opportunity to learn about his fellow networkers within the community, but his fellow networkers may never realize he/she exists. Therefore, he/she never actually shares in the wealth, but only reads about the success of his/her fellow members.

The concept of the on-line business networking community is to bring together a group of entrepreneurs who can work as a group to promote themselves and each other as they grow and develop their businesses through the exchange of information. Each member of the group possesses certain talents and services that are offered within the group. The networking circle would ideally benefit by each member contributing a certain amount of knowledge and know-how in areas of need. For instance, if I happen to require assistance in setting up a database for my newsletter subscribers, another member may be able to walk me through the procedures step by step. Should a member need to hire someone to create a new logo for her business, I may recall the name of a member who creates logos for a living and therefore can refer the logo designer.

For these communities to work effectively, it is crucial for each member to become an active participant. Sad to say, the number of lurkers far exceeds the number of leaders in these on-line groups. One major reason that lurkers choose to remain behind the scenes is because they are somewhat frightened to speak up for the first time, fearing they will say the wrong thing or may not

be accepted by their new group of peers. Many are afraid of asking the wrong question or giving out bad advice or information. Allow me to stress, **THERE ARE NO WRONG QUESTIONS!** In the beginning, we all started out asking questions and looking to others for the answers. The seasoned members of the networking group are more than happy to serve as mentors to those who are just starting out in their business. Professional advice is there for the taking -- you need only to ask for it.

Active leaders and members of on-line communities should realize that the only way that the entire group will ever grow and prosper as individuals is when each member of the group becomes active in their participation. If you are a lurker, you will only benefit by getting to know the members of your group, sharing your expertise and knowledge with the group, and establishing your credibility in your field. As a leader, your job is to encourage lurkers to step forward and become a vital participant of the group so that the group can gain strength in its numbers as a credible and viable networking community.

Success will only come to those who are willing to shed their shyness, step out of the closet, and transform into a community participant! By becoming a leader yourself, you can experience the same level of success as your fellow networking leaders!

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