**15. Networking**

**Networking Overview:** Networking is a common synonym for developing and maintaining contacts and personal connections with a variety of people who might be helpful to you and your career.

**Networking Essentials:** The art of networking has several essential aspects:

* Meeting people who can be of help to you
* Collecting and updating contact info, like phone numbers and e-mail addresses
* Keeping in regular contact with those in your network
* Thanking people for their help
* Helping others when asked

**Networking and Problem Solving:** Deft networking also allows you to tap technical expertise when you are faced with business problems that exceed your capacity, or that of your colleagues or staff, to solve. Knowing whom to contact with a particular business question or problem is like having a consultant at the ready to assist you. Career advancement often depends heavily on being able to get quick, accurate answers to problems from your personal networks.

**Networking and Continuing Education:** In using your network of personal contacts to assist with problem solving, you should be increasing your base of knowledge. Additionally, you should utilize your network for educational purposes even when there is not a specific problem at hand. Keeping in touch with knowledgeable people and discussing their fields of expertise can be an informal but extremely rich source of continuing education.

**Mentoring Programs:** Some companies and organizations offer formal [mentoring](http://financecareers.about.com/od/careerstrategiestactics/a/mentoring.htm) programs in which younger, less experienced employees are introduced to older, veteran employees who will provide career advice and guidance. These programs can be structured to varying degrees, possibly with meetings on a regular basis, and possibly with formal agendas for these meetings. Whether or not the company or organization in question sponsors a formal mentoring program, savvy younger employees should attempt to establish informal mentoring relationships with more senior employees, such as their supervisors or more experienced colleagues.

**Networking Challenges:** Employees who work at remote locations away from headquarters, who spend weeks or months at a time at clients' worksites are particularly disadvantaged regarding networking, since they have limited face-to-face contacts with other key personnel in their companies.

**Benefits of Networking**

The most obvious benefit is that networks can be a very effective forum for sharing information between organisations, and indeed sub-sectors, within the Community Sector. Networks built around a common theme or purpose can assist workers from diverse organisations in learning what others are doing, what is new and what is considered good or leading practice.

Perhaps a more subtle benefit of networking is the way in which partnerships, collaborative projects and the sharing of services can be identified and implemented. There is a good deal of interest in the Community Sector regarding sharing and collaboration between services, and benefits can include reduction in overheads, sharing staff in a tight labour market and a more streamlined path for consumers in the Community Sector. But where to start?

Networking can be the fertiliser that fosters the development of good relationships between individuals and their organisations, and leads to collaboration between services. Effective relationships between individuals and their organisations are more often than not the first step in sharing services and collaboration. How much easier is it to approach someone you know as opposed to a complete stranger? So too with collaborative projects between independent organisations. Organisations that network effectively will know of other organisations with similar or complementary philosophies, consumers or services, and through good relationships with these organisations the desire to share or collaborate becomes a real possibility.

Networking can save your organisation duplication, money and time thereby allowing you to provide more cohesive and targeted services to those that use or need your organisation. In short, effective networking can benefit your organisation and more importantly can benefit the people that rely on your organisation. With the promise of spreading limited resources further for your organisation, and improved service delivery for those that use your organisation, it becomes a little easier to see how networking and networks are in fact a pivotal part of the work that we do. While it is sometimes difficult to block out two hours of one’s day for a network meeting it might be worth remembering that the strength of our organisations, and the Community Sector as a whole, relies on our ability and willingness to work together towards a common goal.

**Seventeen-second Introduction Speech Activity**

In table rounds of about six to eight, give each participant about two minutes (or more, as time permits) to write a 17-second introduction about themselves. As an aid, have handouts ready with the following sections for each participant to answer:

What is my track record?

What gives me credibility?

In what area(s) do I have expertise?

What do I do and how do I do it?

What makes me stand out from others who do what I do?

What is the result, benefit, or outcome of what I do?

After participants have taken time to write their introduction, instruct them all to exchange business cards with one another. Encourage them to take notes on the back of each business card.

Then, around the table, allow 2 minutes (use a timer!) for each person in the group to do the following:

1. Hold up their own business card so others in the group will recognize it from the stack of business cards each now has in front of them.
2. Take up to 45 seconds to deliver their introduction speech.
3. Take the remaining time to receive feedback from the other attendees at their table. (What worked well about the introduction? What about the introduction caused others to want to know more about the speaker?)

After the allotted time, instruct all attendees to repeat the process with the next person in their group. Repeat until all group members has had an opportunity to take a turn.