

The joy of connecting

Bored with the same old networking chatter? Feel you're wasting your time – again? Dread going? Rather be somewhere else? Read on for some different and exciting ideas of the 'left side' of the business— networking— and taking the next step to connecting.

by **Bonnie Ross-Parker**

plus AUDIO

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In the time it takes you to read this article, it's my intention to provide you with enough "new ideas" to incorporate in your networking efforts to change your experiences from "mediocre" to great. Are you with me?

Let's face it. It doesn't matter where you live or what company or service you represent, every market place is competitive and crowded. The majority of people are eager to throw a card at you and actually believe that having their business card is enough of a connection to foster business. Well, this may work for some networkers; however, I believe there's a better way!

During my professional life, I have chosen to connect with others in ways that felt different and exciting.

While networking is systematic and organized and a process by which you meet people, connecting is engaging in conversations, listening for similarities, finding ways to support someone else and being resourceful.

Everything you do is a statement of your belief, talent and dedication. By consciously choosing to *connect* with individuals in a style that is caring and harmonious it allows you to discover what you have in common. When you deliver value time after time, others are impacted.

You will soon realize by being authentic, observant, caring, generous and joyful your bottom line will improve.

People choose to do business with people they like and with whom they find things in common. In typical networking situations, no one even takes time to find out “if” there’s a fit, because people are scrambling to distribute and collect as many business cards as possible! Once you return to the office, then what?

The Joy of Connecting™ is about enriching lives, yours and those you come in contact with. When we are connected to our own values and passions, we can deliberately share our talents with others. In other words, we already know who we are and what we bring to the people we meet.

Connecting implies,

What do I offer that can help you?

Who do I know that you need to meet?

What challenges do you face that I might provide a solution for?”

(Are you still with me?)

There are three specific strategies in The Joy of Connecting™ model. They are: Differentiate, Be Memorable and Make A Difference. When you are at networking events and apply any of these strategies consistently and conscientiously there is no end to the results you can achieve. The skills for connecting effectively will help you in business and in life.

Let's start with...

Strategy #1 – Differentiate.

Every day individuals are clamoring for their share of business. The reality is that unless you differentiate who you are and how you offer your product or service, you will have a difficult time securing customers. Being different in business and in life has its advantages. When we were younger, we succumbed to “peer pressure”. In the business world, “same” is a disadvantage.

When you differentiate you are self-confident, believe in your product or service AND show genuine interest in helping others.

You showcase your uniqueness by separating yourself from everyone else. While you value who you are and what you offer, recognize that your success in selling is directly linked to your ability to connect. Your goal in networking situations is to listen, to learn, to initiate conversations and to find ways you can bring your skills, ideas, resources and support to the people you meet.

In the business world, to be able to differentiate yourself will give you a competitive advantage and is critical to your success. The more you talk the less you learn. The more you listen the more you learn. Dale Carnegie said it best. “You can make more friends in three months by being interested in them than you can in three years by getting others interested in you.” When you demonstrate your own generous style, others will take notice. Guaranteed.

Strategy # 2 is Be Memorable.

There are 2 components to being remembered. They are appearance and behavior. Why does Larry King always wear suspenders? Why did Bob Hope always carry a golf club? Is there anyone who doesn't know Barbara Bush's signature style? Sure these individuals are famous; however, they also recognized the value of their unique style.

One of my colleagues always wears unusual ties. Another friend, a very successful networker, never shows up in public without a hat. I wear cowboy boots every day, year round. It is my signature style. People notice. I say, *"Why show up if you don't want to be remembered?"*

Perhaps creating a "personal look" will help you connect with others. Others will be curious. Look for people that exude style when you're networking. Create conversations by asking questions. Commenting on someone's style is an effective door opener. Remember. People love to talk about themselves. Be a great listener.

Be Memorable— Part 2 is behavior.

Behavior has two components. We can be remembered for the wrong reason (not a good idea) or for the right reason (yeah!). This is easy—lateness, failure to follow up and follow through, always talking, interruptive, and cheap are not characteristics that foster connection.

On the other hand, writing thank you notes, doing what you say you're going to do, making introductions, generosity and resourcefulness are great traits for which to be remembered. When you network, choose to connect with individuals that reflect the kind of people with whom you want to do business.

Appearance and behavior play a significant role in whether someone feels comfortable and connected to you. Don't

underestimate the value of being memorable.

Again, in a crowded market place, you want to be recognized for the right reasons.

The last strategy is— Make A Difference.

When you possess a desire to make a difference you must be clear about who you are, what you say, and what you do. Increase your ability to make a difference by being prepared to listen and to serve others. When you make a difference you are choosing to make every connection a positive experience. You set a high standard on how to treat others by your own example.

Making a difference shifts the traditional networking paradigm from what's in it for me to what's in it for them.

Your genuine concern and support of others creates lasting relationships which over time will increase your business.

Think of experiences you've had where someone made a difference for you. They offered you help, supported your initiative, and went out of their way to get you something you needed. You can offer that same support to someone else and make a difference in their life. The choice is yours.

Extend invitations to your colleagues and associates to attend future events as your guest. Introduce people you meet to people they need to know. Introduce people you know to people they need to meet. Establish yourself as an individual eager and willing to help others. Go the extra mile to offer someone a resource.

Every connection affords you an opportunity to make a difference in both your personal and professional life. When networking most individuals are more interested in making a sale before making a difference.

***You make a difference for others
when you serve them first by
putting them ahead of your own
agenda.***

People will do business with people who bring them value.

You never know who you will meet and the impact you can make on their life. You never know who will meet you and the difference that encounter will make on your life. People are listening to what you say, noticing how you look, and watching what you do. Decide to leave positive indelible imprints everywhere you go and in everything you do. Know the difference you can make by being of service to those you meet in your journey.

Consider creating and sustaining your personal and business relationships by embracing The Joy of Connecting™. Beginning today, I challenge you to experience life by discovering **joy** in every connection. When you make every connection count, others notice. You will experience networking from an entirely new perspective. Try it. Anticipate great results.



Bonnie Ross-Parker is an author, speaker and entrepreneur. In 2002, Bonnie was honored with Atlanta's prestigious **Athena Award**, presented to a woman recognized for community service and for actively assisting women in the attainment of their professional excellence and leadership skills. Bonnie has a background in education, franchise development, publishing, mentorship, network marketing, and community development.

Bonnie created and became the Associate Publisher of "*Women to Women: Cultivating Our Community*" – a women's section in the *The Gazette Newspaper* of Atlanta. Her articles on owning one's own business and entrepreneurship have appeared in publications including: *Wealth Building, Home Business Magazine, Business to Business and Entrepreneur's Business Start-Ups*.

Bonnie was recently selected for "*The Women Looking Ahead 100s List*" of Georgia's Most Powerful and Influential Women. She was formerly the Executive Director of eBusiness Development for eWomenNetwork.com. Bonnie has earned a Certification in Network Marketing at the University of Chicago.

Bonnie founded a women's group called "**The Joy of Connecting**" in Atlanta. Its mission is to support women entrepreneurs, business owners, and other professional women. She anticipates expanding "**The Joy of Connecting**" across the US and Canada. "The Joy of Connecting" gatherings give participants an opportunity to create new relationships, foster personal and professional bonds, and be in an environment that supports and honors who they are and what they do.

To learn more about Bonnie, including licensing the Joy of Connecting™ in your area and follow Bonnie's blog, go to: TheJoyofConnecting.com

AUDIO

NETWORKING | RELATIONSHIP | PARTNERSHIP | SKILLS

The joy of connecting— Personally Speaking

This is the complete Volume One of a four CD series where Bonnie shares her views on life as she lives it. Volume One contains 14 inspirational essays designed to enhance your journey and provide you with actions you can implement to enrich your life.

by **Bonnie Ross-Parker**

approximately 45 minutes downloadable MP3

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1. Learning or Reviewing— Where Are You?
2. Intention vs. Action
3. Judgments Not Allowed
4. Your Ideas Matter
5. Where Does One Draw The Line?
6. If Only
7. A Woman - Who Is She?
8. Just For Today
9. Letting Go of Things
10. H.U.G.S.
11. Laugh for The Fun of It
12. Youth or Wisdom: It's a Trade-Off!
13. The Long and Winding Road
14. Show Up and Be Remember

In the complete four volume, compact CD set, ***The Joy of Connecting - Personally Speaking***, Bonnie Ross-Parker shares 56 essays which reflect her view on life as she lives it. Designed to enhance your journey personally and professionally, each one will inspire you to be more, do more and create more joy in your life.

Volume I - IV costs \$44 including shipping and handling and is available from Bonnie's website, here:

BonnieRossParker.com/product