


MASTER N.E.T.W.O.R.K.I.N.G.

How to build a business by talking to people

A portrait of Tracey Smolinski, a woman with long blonde hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a blue top and a blue and white beaded necklace. The background is dark.

*"The principles Tracey describes work.
The business she's built is the proof."
Sharon Lechter, co-Author Rich Dad, Poor Dad*

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CHAPTER ONE

GET TALKING, GET CONNECTING!

Growing up, my parents always taught me to respect my elders, and that children should be seen, and not heard. Of course, when you are young, vulnerable, and naïve, after hearing this sort of thing time and time again, it becomes a natural instinct to keep quiet around adults. But as soon as I was old enough to take part in the art of conversation, guess what? Yes, Mum and Dad, I *do* have a voice, yes I *do* want to be seen, and yes, I *do* want to be heard!

As children we are also told not to talk to strangers, which is totally understandable when you are three years old and unable to recognise the good people from the bad.

It's no surprise that because this is instilled in us, when we blossom into young adults, many of us have a fear of not knowing what to say to someone when we first meet them. We have to learn to say, "Actually, I do want to talk to strangers."

We all want to belong to groups. Belonging is a strong human need, whether it is being a part of a family, a gang of friends, a group of work colleagues, or a sports team, we have an inherent desire to socialise and to be an important part of something greater than ourselves. This implies a relationship that is greater than simple acquaintance or familiarity. The need to belong is also the need to give and receive feelings and build relationships.

Obviously, not everyone shares the same interests, so not everyone wants to belong to the same

group.

Without the feeling of belonging, we cannot identify with others as clearly, and if we don't feel that we belong, we may feel uncomfortable and become distant and avoid group situations.

On the other hand, if we feel that we do belong to a group we feel motivated, proud, and accepted. And we identify with the people that we want to have that bond and connection with. The feeling of being part of a bigger community creates greater self-esteem, better health, and happiness.

In the *Disney* animated movie *Pocahontas* here is the saying, "Ohana means family. Family means nobody gets left behind or forgotten." We all want to be in that family, we all want to be remembered and not forgotten, we all want to belong.

My daughter Carly always used to mimic *Pocahontas* and repeated this all the time when she was a little girl. She knew that I always loved quality time with my children and that our family always came first.

Talking to strangers

Our parents brainwashed us into the fear of talking to strangers but now, as adults in business, it is imperative to become great networkers to build our contacts. That means talking to people we have never met before.

Networking is the key to making new friends, building new relationships, finding new business associates, and forging great partnerships. With these connections you will be able to increase your network tenfold.

Many people don't like starting conversations

with strangers. Some people can't even talk to people that they do know. But it only takes one question to start a conversation. It's as easy as that! So try it, start the conversation.

Before I ever attended networking events, I always loved being surrounded by lots of people, so I believed that I'd be a natural at networking. My father was a publican and every day I would go down into what was like a big living room, and find a pub full of people. I loved it. Chatting, mingling, and enjoying conversations with customers became a big part of my life and I knew that one day I wanted to work with lots of people. I loved people but nobody taught me how to network in the business world.

Business networking is important to establish a mutually beneficial relationship with other like-minded people, potential clients, and referral partners, to create a win-win scenario for both parties.

I say 'like-minded' because I like to build relationships with people that have the same outlook and ethos as myself. There is no point in trying to build relationships with people that don't believe in the way you do business, or don't deal with things in a similar manner to you. For the relationship to work (whether it is business or pleasure), you need to be on the same wavelength.

The key to truly effective business networking is the establishment of a reciprocally beneficial relationship – and that's an incredibly rare event at the standard shake-hands-and-exchange-your-business-card events that are commonly touted as business networking opportunities.

The purpose of business networking is to increase business revenue – one way or another. The

increase of the bottom line can be immediately apparent, as in developing a relationship with a new client, or this may develop over time, as in building your network, or learning a new business skill.

The best business networking groups operate as exchanges of business information, ideas, and support.

The most important skill for effective business networking is listening. Focusing on how you can help the person you are listening to, rather than on how he or she can help you, is the first step to establishing a reciprocally beneficial relationship.

The power of networking

It got me thinking of how powerful it is when you meet someone and how things can change so drastically.

In June 2010 I decided to attend The Polo event at Fonmon Castle in order to network and see who I could make new connections with. I bumped into a girl that I knew and she was telling me she was looking for a partner, she was fed up of being on her own. I mentioned to her that I was going through a divorce at the time. Only a few weeks before I had bought a web domain name to potentially set up a dating agency and was telling her about this. A few minutes later she asked me if I could introduce her to this guy that she could see walking towards us. She said he was very handsome and the week before he said hello to her in the local supermarket, and she thought maybe she may be able to go out with him on a date, so I agreed.

I called him over to us and said that I thought I knew him. He didn't think we'd met. I told him that I wasn't trying to chat him up, but he did look familiar. He asked me my name and I told him, "I'm Tracey

from Introbiz.”

He said “Oh, that’s strange, you know Wenda don’t you?”

I said, “Yes.”

He said, “You are doing a fashion show for your network aren’t you... with Wenda?”

“Yes, that’s right”

He said “I’m Paul from Moss Bros.”

Wenda, our mutual friend, had mentioned to both of us that Paul could help me for the fashion show by providing the menswear.

I went on to say what a small world it was and proceeded to introduce him to this girl that wanted an introduction to him. They briefly talked but Paul then came to me to talk and we engaged in a great conversation.

We got on really well and we then began to date. After a few months, I said to Paul that he should come in the business with me but he was very apprehensive as he didn’t really understand networking as retail was all he’d ever known.

Eighteen months went by, and in April 2012 Paul decided that he would come into the business with me. We said we would give it a year and if there was no growth in the business by then, he would go back into retail. He was getting job offers in Dubai, Bristol, and Cardiff, but we made a joint decision that we’d try to make the business work for us.

Life is all about risks, but sometimes you just have to go for it and make it happen. So we started.

In May 2012 one of our members, Rob Warlow from Business Loan Services, asked Paul and me if we wanted to go to London to see some great speakers one Saturday morning in May. Paul had only recently

started working with me and didn't 100% get networking, what the concept was or what the benefits were of connecting with and meeting new people.

We had to get up at 5am and head off at 6am on a Saturday morning and Paul said, "Really, do we have to?"

I said, "Come on – you never know who you'll meet on the day or what you'll learn."

So Paul agreed, and off we went with Rob up the M4. Little did we know how that day would change our lives, and the impact of meeting new people would also change us.

There were three fabulous speakers at the conference:

- Kevin Green, a Welsh entrepreneur who made his millions in property with his company Kevin Green Wealth;
- Andy Harrington, a professional speaker who made his money through speaking and selling courses at his speaking academy;
- and Sharon Lechter, an American entrepreneur and best-selling author who had sold millions of pounds worth of books, was on the board for financial literacy for George Bush, and went on to serve Barack Obama as well.

They all stood up on stage and told great stories of how they became successful, but one thing that they all said was that it was who you were connected to that mattered.

Sharon went on to say, "It is also how you leverage those connections."

At that moment, Paul looked at me, and said,

“I’ve been listening to all the speakers and I get it. I now understand what you mean about networking and connections.”

Paul had a light-bulb moment and realised that he knew so many people in business that he had served, met, and sold to over the years. He said, “I need to start telling all the people I know about Introbiz, and see if we can get them to join our network.”

I agreed and felt such elation that he now knew what I was talking about, and could now see the full potential of Introbiz.

You see, a lot of people don’t understand the concept of networking, or really know the benefits of what you get by going out there and meeting new people. This is why I wanted to write my story to share what has happened to us in our business and how it has changed our lives.

When we were listening to the three speakers, little did we know that we would be doing business with them all again in the future. It’s funny how things happen and what opportunities are opened up to you.

Two months after the conference in London, Paul came up with the idea of hosting a business expo in Cardiff and I suggested that perhaps we should ask Kevin Green to speak for us. We wanted to have inspiring business owners to share their knowledge, and to inspire others as they had inspired us. Luckily he agreed and he went on to speak, telling his story and also who he was connected to.

In 2013 Paul and Kevin met at a coffee shop for a catch up and Paul asked Kevin if he knew any of the entrepreneurs on BBC’s *Dragons Den*, and he said that he knew Hilary Devey.

Paul was excited at this news, as we always really

liked Hilary, we had a great respect and admiration for her, and Paul asked Kevin if he could ask Hilary to come and speak at our expo in September 2013. We didn't know if she would attend, but luck was on our side – Kevin asked her, and she agreed.

By having Hilary at our expo, and bringing a Dragon to Cardiff, it drew a great crowd and was great for our Introbiz brand. It was an amazing day and Hilary went down a storm. The crowd loved her. We did a Q&A with her and the audience asked her lots of questions about business, its pitfalls, and her top tips.

She went on to say that networking was a huge part of her success and without it, you don't make the connections or see the opportunities otherwise.

These entrepreneurs were all saying that networking is great, it works, and they all became successful.

In May 2013 Paul and I got married and I thank the girl that I had bumped into at The Polo event. If she had not asked me to introduce her to Paul, we would never have met. I'm sorry for her that they didn't make a connection, but I'm grateful to her also, as he did connect with me. I will always be thankful to her.

Let me take you to May 2015.

We were looking for some new speakers at the expo and Sharon Lechter had approached me via LinkedIn to see if I wanted to be mentored by her. She had just started a mentoring programme for business owners. Paul and I thought it would be a great idea if Sharon could speak at our expo and fly over from the USA. So we approached her. She came back to me to say that she would think about it and check her schedule.

A few weeks later, we were approached by a lady named Camilita Nuttall, a professional speaker who wanted to speak at our expo. As we were waiting to hear back from Sharon, and only had one space left, I told Camilita that I had already chosen them, but that I was waiting on a speaker to confirm, namely Sharon. I told Camilita that I would put her on reserve and if a spot became available I would let her know. Camilita said that was fine, and went on to tell me that she was travelling to Arizona the following week for ten days and when she returned to the UK, she would get in touch to see if she had the gig with us.

I asked her what she was doing in Arizona and she mentioned that she was staying with Sharon Lechter on her ranch. I said “Sorry, who did you say you were staying with?” and Camilita said “Sharon Lechter.”

I said “That is so bizarre. What a small world as Sharon Lechter was the speaker that I had approached.” Camilita couldn’t believe it and she and I were laughing at the coincidence.

Camilita said, “I’ll tell you what, Tracey. I’ll speak to Sharon for you when I am with her and see if she’ll speak at the expo for you.”

I was so pleased that Camilita was so kind to offer to do that for me, that I said to her, “If you are going to do that for me, then one good turn deserves another.” I agreed that she could speak at the expo for us, and that we’d find a way of fitting her into the schedule.

Obviously, Camilita was so pleased. She also told me that Sharon was her mentor and that she had signed up to her programme. I told her that we were considering it and Camilita advised us to go for it.

This goes to show that if you offer to do

something for someone, which Camilita did out of the goodness of her heart, we gave something back to her. She didn't necessarily know that I would offer her to speak anyway, as she didn't really know me.

We always say about networking and building relationships that it's about giving. If you give one day you may receive. It may not always be straight away, but one day it'll come back to you. I don't know about you, but I love giving to people. It's so rewarding, giving rather than receiving. Don't get me wrong, I love to be given nice things, but the pleasure of seeing someone else's face when you give them something, or you help them in some way that makes a real difference to their life, is amazing. I love it! Think back to the last time that you gave something to someone or helped someone in some way and the pleasure that they got from you. Isn't it fabulous to see their reaction?

Camilita went to Arizona, spent time with Sharon and by the time she came back, Paul and I had signed up to Sharon's Master Mentors Group.

Sharon agreed to speak but it could only be via a live link on Skype, as she had a prior engagement with her daughter in the States on the same day as our expo.

We felt that Sharon would be a fantastic mentor and we thought to ourselves that this may be a wonderful opportunity to learn from one of the best. She is a very successful entrepreneur, so I thought *Wow, if I'm going to choose anyone to mentor me it's going to be Sharon Lechter*. As far as I was concerned, she was very well qualified to coach and mentor Paul and myself. She talked the talk, but she also walked the walk. There are many coaches and mentors out there but not many of them as successful as Sharon. We had

found our mentor and who would have thought three years earlier that we were going to be mentored by her when we saw her speaking in London. No one could have predicted that. We would have thought it impossible, but most things are possible, so go out there and make things happen for yourself, like we have. If you believe in something you should just go ahead and do it!

The wonderful thing is that if Paul and I had not made the decision to go to London in 2012, we would not have met Sharon, not heard her speak, Paul may not have understood networking, and also we may never have made the decision to let her mentor us. We would not have realised who she was, the trust would not have been there, and we would now most likely be going down another path. Perhaps we were meant to meet her – who knows?



