

## **Double Your Contacts and Double Your Fun by Networking with a Friend**

*By Liz Lynch*

Even though I'm an independent consultant, I've been collaborating with others lately on different projects and ventures to accelerate my business. But it wasn't until recently, when one of my project partners and I had lunch with a big name prospect, that I discovered the power of collaborating in networking as well.

We were better able to expound on each other's strengths than talk about ourselves individually. It was easier for me to say that Ann is an expert at raising money, for example, than it would have been for Ann to say it herself. And, of course, when Ann said I was a master at helping companies grow profits, I could feign modesty, confident that my message got across.

The following week I had lunch with my friend, Beth Silver, who mentioned that she's been buddying up with another friend, Jeanne McDonald, on many networking occasions. Both are strong networkers on their own, but together, they've doubled the size of their contact bases and increased their respective opportunities in a short amount of time. I was intrigued by this idea of networking partners, so I delved further with the pair to learn some of the secrets to successful collaborations:

- **Test the chemistry.** Although they work in completely different fields—Beth runs Doubet Consulting, a “Target Advocate” firm helping companies enhance their overall value proposition for their target customers, and Jeanne is a financial representative with Northwestern Mutual—their shared values of helpfulness and openness make this partnership work. They spent time up front brainstorming about how they could help one another. “It's important to really understand the other person’s business and the types of contacts that would be beneficial,” says Jeanne.
- **Embrace some structure.** Jeanne and Beth used to meet just to catch up but have started to hold regular lunches that include others. Along with their guests, they can make multiple connections in the same timeframe. Moreover, neither is shy about articulating what she needs at any given moment, or giving each other action items. At a recent meeting, Jeanne came with a list of referrals she needed both for herself and for those in her network, and Beth immediately was able to determine where she could help.
- **Always connect.** On the flip side of the traditional selling mantra, “Always be closing,” Beth and Jeanne go into every meeting with no agenda other than to meet new people. Without the pressure of trying to open a book of business in a single conversation, which is unrealistic, they can be present and listen more actively to what the new person needs. As Beth says, “When I meet a new person and learn what they do and they learn what I do, then we’ve accomplished something.”

- **Think beyond yourself.** Remember that you're not out there just for your own benefit; you're also networking for your other contacts. Keep your ears open for opportunities in every conversation. Even when they meet people in industries unrelated to theirs, Jeanne and Beth understand that they may be able to recommend the new contact to someone they know. The payoff, Beth feels is, "when someone is asked for marketing or management support, or needs financial planning and insurance information, I hope we are an option."
- **Support each other's networks.** The pair helps each other enormously, calling and e-mailing often with leads and updates of those they think the other should meet, and sharing notes on where they've networked and what new events are available. But they also discuss how they can help each other's contacts and make time to meet with those the other refers. And remember, no good deed goes unnoticed. When Jeanne received a handwritten thank you note from a gentleman looking for a job, Beth bent over backwards to offer her help.
- **Leverage technology.** When Beth connects Jeanne to a new contact, she facilitates the introduction by forwarding each of them information about the other, hoping that this will help them get together faster. And don't forget to tap into each other's online networks through sites such as TheSquare.
- **"Fan" the flames.** Somehow it doesn't seem like bragging when someone else says something great about you. Just as Ann and I could speak in glowing terms about each other to other people, Beth and Jeanne promote each other's strengths. Even a somewhat biased third party testimonial has more impact than tooting your own horn.

Whether you hate going solo or are simply ready to take your networking up a notch, it's easy to double your contacts and double your fun by partnering up.

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