

***Networking for Life:
Creating and Extending Relationships for Life***



John Humphrey, Co-founder

Networking for Life Defined

Networking. When we hear the word “networking” we all have different images that manifest themselves in our mind. For some, that image is a business gathering or “mixer” where we are exchanging leads and platitudes with colleagues or friends. For others, it might conger up negative feelings associated with sales or business development. If you’ve never considered yourself a “salesy” type of person, just the image creates discomfort. Understood. Even so, networking is much more than these alternatives might suggest, rather, networking is a lifelong quest of serving others by connecting with them and then building relationships based on trust, activity and results.

As humans, we all yearn for relationship. We simply cannot live in isolation without other humans. This is why isolation is the worst experience for prisoners of war. Prisoners create their own language to communicate with one another and there are documented cases where entire languages have been created in war camps to facilitate communication and connectedness. Today in modern day prisons, inmates have their own language and currency that they use to communicate, barter and trade. Even in these dysfunctional current day environments, relationship, is the cornerstone of community.

This is not a viewpoint on the psychology of human interaction. There are plenty of PhD’s who have written and published on the topic, however, it is safe to say that at the core of human existence is the need for other people. We need each other in order to survive. We have created civilizations and a legal system that governs how people should live together. What behavior is right and acceptable and what behavior is considered outside of the norm. In the book of Genesis, the God says “that it is not good for man to be alone” and the human race was born. If you are an agnostic or atheist, you acknowledge that through evolution Homosapiens survived because they formed families and extended families which led to tribes and eventually societies. Regardless of your beliefs, whether religious or not, we were created to be connected.

Networking for life is the concept that those individuals who invest time connecting and serving others have a much higher probability of achieving their goals than those who don’t. The combined energy developed from people working together is very powerful and technology is making it easier to connect.

Connected through Web 2.0

Our current world is proliferated with Web 2.0 tools and technologies that facilitate connecting. It only took FaceBook two years to reach a market audience of 50 million people and MySpace now boasts over 200 million users. Google searches were up to 35 billion in 2008 from 2.6 billion in 2006. LinkedIn boasts 30 million subscribers. Twitter use is exploding as individuals share their daily activities with others. In 2008, 1 in 8 marriages began on line. Tools like SalesBook and other social networking tools designed for specific business and personal uses are exploding and the adoption rate is accelerating. The genie is out of the bottle and the way we connect with one another has been forever changed. I would argue that while we are connected, we are not well networked. Networking is about connecting through relationships and service, not name dropping or totaling LinkedIn contacts. The technology is only one element of connecting to others. If you are just connected, you only have the first, and least important, part of the recipe for success.

Building Trust

Relationships are built on trust. Trust comes from shared experience that is tested over time. No quick fix here. While there is increasing evidence that trust can be developed online, true networking requires both action and positive results. Just like a good recipe, when you add those final critical elements, the whole becomes better than the sum of its parts. For bread it is yeast. For water is it hydrogen. For relationships, it is trust, action and results. Action is the side of trust that produces a favorable result and demonstrates that your behaviors that are predictable. You said you were going to do this and you did it.

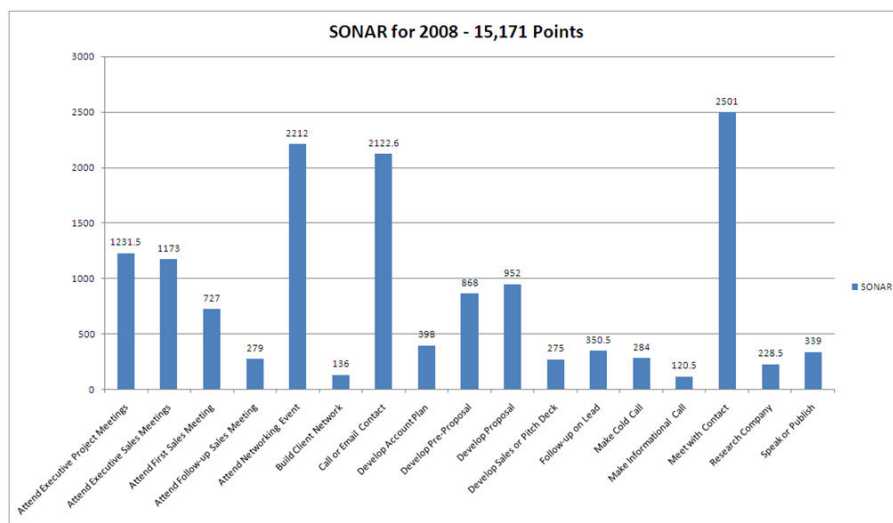
Trust level goes up. We decided to bring you in as a partner in the deal and you betrayed us. Trust evaporates.

Trading Beans

Trading beans is the practice of sharing and trading information with others when meeting one on one. Two keys: meeting together and sharing information. If you are not meeting together and sharing ideas of value, then you are not trading beans and you are not developing trust. Think about a courtship. Did you share everything on the first date? Of course you didn't. It is a process that takes time. When you are networking there is a voice in our heads always asking "how much should I tell them?" The visual metaphor of beans allows us to imagine that we are sitting at a table giving beans to others. As a practice, we don't give without getting. It may be intelligence about a particular account or just an interesting book or journal that you recently read that the other person might enjoy or find useful. It may have nothing to do with business. In fact, I would argue that the most important networking occurs when you are looking for something personal: a top sports medicine doctor for your son who just injured his knee, a top neurologist to help your sister who has seizures, a reference for a college that your child wants to attend, a local church, synagogue or mosque as you are new to the area. While trading beans is not a matter of life and death, and you may get a bean without giving one if the need is serious, bean trading for business, requires reciprocity. Where there is no reciprocity, the beans wither and die, and worse, the person to whom you gave those beans loses trust because you didn't deliver on the implied promise.

Putting Networking into Practice

The great coach Vince Lombardi once said "practice doesn't make perfect, only perfect practice makes perfect." What a great word. It doesn't matter if you are in business, music, sports or theater, practicing to be *perfect* is way more important than just practicing. Networking for Life is a system of practicing the art of networking so that your results may be perfect. I would argue that in order to be perfect, you have to develop a system for tracking your progress. At Pariveda, we call that system SONAR (sales, opportunities, networking, and results) and each employee tracks their activity "touch points" in the marketplace every day. For example, when you reach out to a person you know through either email or phone, you record a point level. When you attend a networking event, you record a point level. When you give a client an interesting article, you record a point level. This author is recording points right now through the writing of this ViewPoint. As a firm, we don't employ a sales force so tracking relationship effectiveness is critical. The chart below illustrates 2008 totals.





Having a system translates an idea into an actionable and measurable goal for us as individuals. We want to create leaders who are investing in the lives of others so helping our employees learn these skills early in their career accelerates success. Because the primary background of our employees is technical, many were never exposed to this concept in college or early in their careers. If Pariveda can create a habit in the first several years of our employee's career, we know that they can become well rounded leaders. As we continue to invest in networking, we are serving a valuable role, not only for Pariveda and each individual who is learning how to become a true "connector" of people, but we are serving the communities where we live. These investments of time, without expectation of a direct reward, deliver exponential return on investment as we "trade beans" with others – giving more than receiving. As we do this as a firm, our "beans" become more valuable, thus we may actually *receive more* than we give. Let me clarify. When you give more than you receive AND you have a critical mass of individuals making the same investment in a local market, the value of the "bean" goes up exponentially because of the collective knowledge that has developed. Much is said about having three degrees of separation, but imagine what happens when all of this knowledge becomes the intellectual capital of a firm. There is no doubt that you will yield contacts, market intelligence, prospects and ultimately clients. It is the "long tail" of networking – exponential value creation.

Inter and Intra Organizational Networking

This topic applies to every organization on the planet, both internally and externally. Most organizations have a "sales team" that is responsible for selling new and existing clients. Why aren't all employees responsible for selling? Isn't the value of the whole greater than the sum of its parts? Some of the most credible people you have in your organization are not investing outside of the four walls of your company. It may be fear, it may be work load, it may be expectations, it may be lack of knowledge. The shame of it is that those individuals may have the strongest points of view and will be able to reach, touch and help others more effectively than those "responsible" for selling and connecting. In large organizations, the IT organization is often blamed for poor performance and lack of alignment with the business. In the CIO Survey published in January, 2009, by CIO Magazine, the data would suggest that while the gap has narrowed between the business and IT, IT is still not working on the most important areas according to business executives. Why is that? If the entire IT organization was "networking" at various levels within "the business," would relationships improve? Do you think that if relationships improved and beans were exchanged that new and better ideas would be generated? Problems solved? Do you think if "the business" was being listened to, even if service levels *didn't improve*, that they would *feel* more aligned and better served? I say yes to all of these questions. Yet, IT doesn't have a system to manage the process, nor do they have the understanding on how to implement networking in their own organization. The results would be significant.

Finally

Networking for life is a state of mind, backed up with hard work and dedication. Steven Covey would put this in the "important but not urgent" category, which by definition means we should actively be doing it. Most will not consistently invest in this activity and will be robbed of the opportunity to serve others in a way that will generate meaningful results. We also rob those we might connect with of the value of our knowledge and extent of our network. This concept can transform your organization and your life. While we focus on "social networking" and "web 2.0" technologies as the answer, we tend to miss the major point - relationship. The technology will continue to make it easier to connect, but we are still responsible to deliver action and trustworthy results to those with whom we are trading beans. It's up to you. Good luck!



About the Author

As Co-Founder and Chairman of the Board of Pariveda Solutions, Inc., John has contributed to the success of the company through driving operational efficiencies and sales effectiveness. Since the company does not employ a direct sales force, a large percentage of John's time is spent coaching and teaching basic networking and sales techniques. His "Networking for Life" topic is sought after by organizations throughout the U.S. This topic, often referred to as "Unlocking the Value of Life Long Relationships" has been presented at various Chamber meetings, private company meetings and college campuses.

About Pariveda Solutions Inc.

Pariveda Solutions (Pariveda) works with organizations to improve their profitability through the deployment of process and technology. Pariveda delivers solutions in the areas of IT Strategy, IT Executive Advisory services, Program and Project Management, Application Development, System Integration, CRM and Business Intelligence. Pariveda's goal is to establish relationships with clients on a local level and deliver high value solutions.

Pariveda Solutions was ranked the 16th fastest growing company in the Dallas Business Journal's 2007 and the 34th fastest in the 2008 edition of the Dallas One Hundred, comprised of the 100 fastest-growing private companies in the DFW Metroplex. Pariveda Solutions was also recently named to the Dallas Business Journal's "Best Places to Work" for 2008 as well as one of Consulting Magazine's 7 "Small Jewels" for 2008. Launched and headquartered in Dallas, Texas, Pariveda Solutions has grown to over 150 employees since 2003. The company has additional offices located in Chicago, Denver, Detroit, Houston and Seattle.

Learn more about the company and the author at www.parivedasolutions.com