

# NETWORKING

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As we develop our careers it is increasingly important to manage a set of contacts that become a part of your network. Remember that for job seekers it is often not just what you know but whom you know as well. Taking that a step further it can also be not only whom you know but whom they know as well.

Let's make a list of all the people that can help you in your career. It is not necessary to use names but for this exercise we will use positions to indicate areas to develop contacts:

- + Fellow Superintendents
- + Former employers
- + General Managers
- + Golf Professionals
- + Golf Association staff
- + Local distributors
- + Manufacturer's representatives
- + Educators
- + Researchers
- + USGA agronomists
- + Media
- + Golfers
- + Neighbors
- + Relatives
- + Former classmates
- + Alumni from your school
- + Seminar instructors
- + Golf Course Architects
- + Consultants
- + Headhunters
- + Agronomists for Management Companies
- + GCSAA staff

Now that you have a list of potential network opportunities, it is time to develop a strategy to build and cultivate relationships with as many people as you can.

I will try to provide a few tips that I have learned, over the years, to help you cast a wider net in developing relationships.

## *Business Cards*

Be certain to have professional business cards with you at all times. Keep your information current. The greatest value is not in handing out your business cards but in exchanging them to develop new contacts. The exchange of business cards alone will not ensure the memory of your encounter. Follow up with an e-mail or a note to set you apart from the crowd.

## *Working the Room*

Set a goal of making a certain number of contacts at any meeting or function you

attend. If there are 100 people at a meeting it is reasonable to assume that you might walk away with 5-10 new contacts depending on the type of function. Target people that are leaders or influential in the industry. Most people are not interested in talking to you for half hour but surely will give you 3-5 minutes of their time.

## *The Elevator Speech*

A long time ago I had a mentor that taught me about the "elevator speech." He indicated that if you got on an elevator and were going up five floors, what would you say in that short time frame to sell yourself to someone? We should all have a speech, prepared in advance, that would allow us to make a connection with anyone. When someone says hello and asks what you do for a living...you should have a quick reply that would be interesting and memorable. Although I call this an elevator speech it is more applicable at social functions, out on the golf course, in the locker room, etc. When introduced to members or guests, at my golf course, I like to reply "Hi, my name is Bruce Williams the golf course superintendent here and I hope I make your game more enjoyable with the conditions that see today." This usually leads to further conversation. The goal is to make a lasting impression.

## *Six Degrees of Separation*

In *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell talks about the origin of this phenomenon. He describes how a large group of people ultimately became connected to one another by just a few, surprisingly connected individuals who provided a common link. Gladwell talks about how there are pivotal people in any network of connected individuals who know a lot of other people. Connect with those who are connected.

When I meet people I try to find out what we have in common together. It is amazing that I rarely find someone that I have nothing in common with. Usually we are familiar with a certain golf course, a city, an individual, a hobby or something else. Without probing you can ask a

## *Points to Consider*

- + Don't wait until you've lost your job to start networking.
- + If you are clueless in the field of networking, then get a mentor.
- + Be prepared and consider every day an opportunity to meet and connect with new people.
- + Don't get caught without it...business cards that is.
- + Don't use a silly sounding e-mail name like "MachoMan" or "TimeForHemp" as it will gain attention but not in a positive manner.
- + Don't be arrogant and listen as much as you talk.
- + Don't monopolize someone's time. Five minutes is a good limit at an initial introduction and there is a difference between following up and becoming a pen pal.
- + Dress to impress and look as good or better than everyone else in the room or at the meeting. Without saying a word you are sending a message by your attire when meeting someone.
- + Don't be shy. It may not be easy for some but, with practice, you will learn how to be assertive and make yourself known.
- + Always be truthful and never embellish your qualifications. Overstating yourself will end up giving you a tag of being dishonest.
- + Serious relationships develop over time. They endure because you work at it. Most people have little use for a person that uses you for what they want and then drops you like a hot potato.
- + Remember to repay the favor of those that have helped you. Take time to help the newcomers and youth of the industry. Extend your hand to them and be sincere.

few questions to find common ground and expand into those areas of mutual interest.

In closing, it is easy to see why networking is so complex. There is a lot to be considered. Nobody grows up with a networking gene in his or her DNA. It is a learned skill. By following some of the tips I have provided you too can get "connected". While I have never thought of making new contacts as merely a lead for a job search, I can tell you that it has been the most enjoyable part of my career. I am one of those individuals that truly feel that the most important thing to me, over the last 35 years, is not what I have accomplished but the people that I have met along the way!