

The Six Degrees of Networking
Tip Of the Week From WMPKG

Packaging Horizons Online
Issue #127 - June 15, 2005
Publisher: JoAnn Hines
jrhines@packaginguniversity.com

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The Six Degrees of Networking
By JoAnn R. Hines, The Chief People Packager

Let's talk about your network. Whether you know it or not you have several different types of networks: business, family, friends, community, acquaintances and so on. So, what are you doing to build and/or maintain the relationships in those networks? Let's face it. Not all relationships require the same strategy or plan for maintenance. It is, however, important to understand that more positive results come from networking in a professional manner. It is very important to treat your network with kid gloves. Continued contact proves to maintain and cultivate the relationship.

There may be people you don't even know have the power to influence the outcome of a particular situation you're in. Worse. You may never ever know it even after having lived through it. Sometimes it's just a matter of who knows you or whom you have met. It may depend on whom your family knows, whom your cleaning lady knows, or on whom your child's teacher knows. See the associations? Get the point? We are all connected and some say that it only takes six "connections" to slip back back to you. Keep that in mind as you cultivate your network. Not only are the people that you come in contact in your network but they also have ancillary connections to your network.

Consider this example:
Person A? This person knows you fairly well. You have been at events together and an informal bond of friendship established. You communicate on a sporadic and irregular basis about work issues. Person A falls off the face of the earth for six months

and does not respond in any way to your attempts at communication. Suddenly, Person A needs a job and he/she illicit your help.

Tough call. Will you help him/her? Consider these points when making your decision.

Person A gets back to you only when her/she needs something. If you help person A is he/she likely to fall of the face of the earth afterwards? Will person A reciprocate when you need assistance? Is it worth your time and energy to help person A? Remember, everyone has a limited amount of time and resources. You need to continually assess how to maintain your relationships without monopolizing your time.

Person B - You know this person in a business sense as well.

Person B sends you periodic notes and picks up the phone to call you and answers when you contact her. This person does communicate, even if it's just a quick email.

Would you help this person? Consider these points in making your decision.

Person B genuinely makes an effort to stay in touch. Person B would most likely really appreciate your efforts and remember it when he/she is in a position to do you a favor.

Sound like hardball? Remember it's your time and you have to make the best use of it. If Person A were no longer in your life would you miss him/her, need his/her assistance in the future? Could he/she influence your career in some way? You be the judge.

The safest path is to be honest and tell the person how you feel (In a nice way, of course.) I'm sorry I can't help you with your job search. If you had stayed in touch I would be better prepared to help. If they get their feelings hurt, too bad. You are operating with professionalism.

The 6 degrees of separation:

Lets consider A & B again. A or B gets a new job. It's not all that uncommon for an acquaintance to turn up within your circle of business or become a person of influence. Small world syndrome! What's in it for you? Would you want to work for them? Could you have them serve as a reference? Is this someone you need to cultivate on an ongoing basis to further your career? Can you strengthen the relationship by helping this person and therefore positioning yourself in a more favorable light? Imagine that A or B knows your boss socially. Would he/she be likely to speak of you favorably? A or B becomes a decision maker in his/her new position. He/She is now someone you need to call on. Will he/she have an open door policy? Will she/he hold a grudge forever because you did not help him/her previously? Would he/she then speak unkindly of you among acquaintances? A or B is now your enemy and feels slighted because you didn't help her/him. What possible influence can she/he have on your career? A or B hits a rough patch. Do you feel guilty for not helping him/her if it had been in your power to do so?

Do you see how we have come full circle? Someone you know as an

acquaintance today could be your boss or control your boss tomorrow. Your cleaning lady could clean the house of your next boss. Or you could be sitting next to your future employer at a PTA meeting. That being said, the best course of action is to remain professional. Even if you feel that you have been taken advantage of or imposed upon. Strategically, it is important to stay professional in all phases of our lives. What goes around comes around? It may not even take six degrees to do that!

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Regards,
JoAnn
Chief People Packager

We Package the People, not
the Products, Women in Packaging, Inc. 4290 Bells Ferry Road, STE
106-17 Kennesaw, GA 30144 Phone: 1-678-594-6872
jrhines@packaginguniversity.com
<http://www.womeninpackaging.org/>
<http://www.packagingcareerhotline.com/>
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