

Beware of Toxic Networking

By John Rossheim, Monster Senior Contributing Writer

If you've put in a number of years in your professional field, this dreaded scenario might sound familiar:

- You get a call or an e-mail from a friend of a colleague, asking for a meeting with a murky agenda.
- Not wanting to offend your colleague, you halfheartedly agree to a brief encounter.
- The day arrives, and so does the feckless schmoozer.
- Though he still seems unsure of what he wants, he spends 45 minutes jabbering about himself and assuring you that you're ideally suited to manage his job search and maybe even offer him a job yourself.

More than ever in this job market that only a hiring manager could love, networking can be toxic. But truth be told, at some point in our careers, most of us have made some reluctant mentor's eyes roll. And while networking is a give-and-take situation, you should never let your intense yearning for a new job overtake your common sense.

Bad Vibrations

It's hard to keep your cool when you've sent out 300 resumes and landed one interview. So it should come as no surprise that many of the long-term unemployed have evolved an off-putting demeanor. Some job seekers "...are behaving badly, and their desperation really makes other people uncomfortable, makes them back off," says Susan RoAne, author of **"How to Work a Room: The Ultimate Guide to Savvy Socializing in Person and Online"**.

Appearing edgy, or even over the edge, perhaps by letting your financial worries trump your self-confidence, is no way to convince a networking contact to help your cause.

Whether you're communicating over the phone, online or face-to-face, keep your positive attitude, your professional smile and treat each contact if they were your most important one.

Mass Dissemination

The Internet is efficient, the Internet is fast, and the Internet lets you squander your political capital faster than a resume with 27 typos. Spam your contacts list with a generic request for vocational guidance, for example, and you're toast.

(continued)

Beware of Toxic Networking

"With the Internet, gaffes are exponentially damaging," says RoAne. And the same goes for running down your phone list and leaving the same singsong voice message in every voice mailbox in town.

"The important thing is to really learn how to utilize message boards and the wider Internet to connect with the people most likely to be able to respond," says Donna Fisher, author of **"Professional Networking for Dummies"**.

- Invest your time wisely with specialized networking sites to help you organize your contacts
- Find new contacts
- Learn helpful hints to successful networking on the Internet

The professionals you meet online have joined these networking sites for the same reasons you have. They are looking to build professional relationships with others, so they are expecting to be contacted. It's a valuable way to make quality connections and new contacts and can be much more effective than cold calling a friend of a friend of a friend.

Trojan Horse Packed with Resumes

"I get a lot of people who want to do lunch without necessarily telling me why," says Matthew Strebe, chief technology officer at Connetic, an information technology services provider in Cardiff, California. "If I can't get a straight answer in one e-mail, that's the end of it."

You're also not doing yourself any favors by hiding the fact that you're going to ask for a favor. Networkers who don't lay it on the line will never earn the respect and assistance they're looking for.

Enough About You

If you think there's no point in showing curiosity about the professional activities of a contact that is much more accomplished, you're wrong. "The bad practice is putting attention on ourselves rather than on others," says Fisher. It's better to let your networking contact be the one to say, "Enough about me, how can I help you?"

Networking is about building and maintaining relationships, and that means you must be willing to give as well as take. It requires reciprocation and unselfishness to cultivate a true environment of mutual benefit and success. Be willing to ask questions, listen and be truly interested in what the other person has to say.

(continued)

Beware of Toxic Networking

Think about different ways that you can help them. This essential quid pro quo will allow both parties to reap rewards in the end.

"The most toxic people take and take and take," says "**Free Agent Nation**" author Dan Pink, who was a chief speechwriter for Al Gore during his vice presidency. "Not only is that annoying and unpleasant, it's also a crappy strategy."

Avoid toxic networking by putting yourself in your contact's shoes.

If you wouldn't want to be hounded by an overbearing, grouchy know it all with a bad attitude, then don't be one!

(End)