

editor's page

Wetnorking?

A former classmate, now a training consultant, surely not dreaming that she would be quoted, once referred to the practice of collecting acquaintances for mutual help as wetnorking. In a profession in which networking is a way of life, her non-serious attitude was like finding a kid who doesn't think Luke Skywalker is a hero.

Are there others like her who are afraid to speak up? How do trainers really feel about this widespread practice? Who invented networking, anyway?

The ASTD computerized networking system, the Member Information Exchange, was too new to list anyone interested in networking about networking, so I fell back on my low-tech network of People Who Always Seem to Know These Things. Networking does not come, at least not directly, from the practice of the British military in World War II of getting things done outside channels with the help of former schoolmates. That was the Old Boy net, and as any woman involved in networking will tell you, we've come a long way, baby. My sources also came up with many famous examples of non-networking: the three witches in *Macbeth*, the devils in *Paradise Lost* and the boys in *Oliver Twist*.

Well, never mind where networking comes from. How do you get started?

"Hi, let's network," is a bit too frontal for most people, even trainers. But closet networking isn't recommended either. The etiquette of networking requires that you make clear your intention to ask something of the other person and to be prepared to give something in return. In fact, some network advocates suggest giving before expecting to receive.

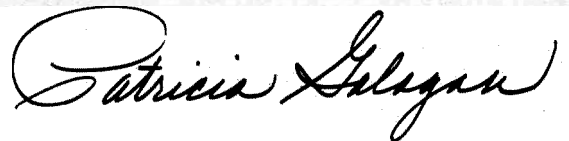
Since the point of networking is to exchange help, it makes sense to establish yourself as competent and to choose for your network people you respect. Networking experts say a good way to begin is to become active in a professional group and to volunteer for projects. Network relationships are informal, and some people wouldn't distinguish between the mechanisms of networking and the natural process of meeting people.

The most common units of exchange in a network are advice, support, service and information. Suc-

cessful networking requires trust, dependability, mutuality and synergy. Networks need nourishment and maintenance, but these investments of time and energy pay off in job leads, visibility, professional growth and the opportunity to be a mentor.

Recently, I had a chance to add to what the literature calls a horizontal occupational network—at a conference for editors of special interest magazines and journals. Could the *Floor Covering Digest* network profitably with *The Pet Dealer*? Could the experience of *The Army Times* help *The American Bar Review*?

The editor next to me made some helpful and intelligent comments about writing editorials, and I began to look at him as a potential networkee. Perhaps the impulse to include him in my net was merely inspired by the name of his magazine—*The National Fisherman*—rather than by a commitment to networking, because instead of networking with him, I wrote about it. But as *The National Fisherman* said, "It's amazing how much you care about something by the time you've finished writing an editorial on it."



—Editor