

PRO ACTION ITEM OF THE MONTH

5 TIPS TO BETTER BROADWAY NETWORKING

A couple of months ago, I met with a recent college grad looking for some advice on how to start a career on Broadway. I asked him how he was at networking. His answer: "Well, of course I'm on Facebook and Twitter. But I'm also very active on LinkedIn, Google+ and even have my own YouTube Channel."

"Not social networking, actual networking," I answered.

He looked a bit confused. And last I heard he was still looking for a job.

The internet and all of its social networking devices have made it much easier for people of similar interests to interact no matter where they are in the world. And the power of Facebook, Twitter and the like is awesome. Personally, I've found a lawyer, an accountant, actors, a real estate broker, and in my single days, a girlfriend or two, all through online social channels. So it is an essential part of every entrepreneur's marketing/networking toolbox.

But most business . . . especially Broadway business . . . occurs face to face. So, nothing is more powerful and more important than actual, live, in person, hand-shakin', drinks-gettin' networking. Or, as my dad calls it, "Showin' face!"

And as it becomes easier and easier to say things like, "Oh, I'll just send an email," or, "Shoot me a text," or, "Find me on Facebook," all of us must remember that it's essential to crawl out from behind our monitors and meet people if we want a successful career. Because social networking is lazy networking.



“BUT I'M NOT GOOD AT NETWORKING”

Don't worry, you're not the only one! In fact, why do you think I started blogging? Sure, I wanted to lift the veil on the Broadway industry in the hopes that more people would want to get involved, but also because it was easier to say everything I say online than in person! (Truth bomb – I'm actually an introvert.)

And just like anything else out there . . . from speaking Spanish to playing golf to raising money, networking is a skill. And it can be learned.

SO HERE ARE
5 TIPS
THAT WILL TAKE THE
WORK
OUT OF NETWORKING!

1 SHAPE UP!

Before engaging in any strenuous activity, it's important to warm yourself up and get yourself in shape for what's to come. And networking ain't no different. Before jumping into the fray of a cocktail party, get those meeting people muscles in shape! First, I recommend you read the ol' classic *How To Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie. I actually read my very worn copy at least once a year. There is simply nothing better (although if you want a deeper dive, pick up this one). Second, one of the best recommendations I have for you shy folk out there that are afraid to open your mouth in a crowd because, "I just won't know what to say next," is to take an improv class. Go to UCB or The Pit or your local Learning Annex and learn how to let yourself go, be yourself, and dive into a conversation like it's a coconut milk bath at your favorite spa.

GET YOUR GROUP-ON 2

The hardest networking to do is when you're thrown into a group of people that you don't have anything in common with (remind me to tell you about the time I was raising money on the Gala circuit and sat at a table filled with modern art enthusiasts). So why start there? Start networking by joining clubs, groups, etc. of people that have similar interests as you do. You'll find it much easier to start conversations when you're passionate about what everyone else is passionate about. Meetup is a great online tool that forces people to meet offline, and they have Meetups for everything. I'm a member of three Meetups and I actually started one. Can you guess which one? I'll give you a hint – it has almost 5,000 members and it's about Broadway. Huh. Sounds like a fun place to network, doesn't it? It's the Broadway Genius Club sponsored by my Groups company, Your Broadway Genius! But networking (especially for raising money) can happen in church

groups, on golf courses, and especially at alumni events. So figure out what you're passionate about, and get in a group of other folks just like you.

REMEMBER YOUR RESEARCH

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I'm gonna tell you a secret. If you have a meeting with me, right before you come in, my assistant hands me a printed out run down on who you are, where you went to school, what your favorite fruit is, etc. Why? I want to know who I'm talking to . . . but it also helps me find out if we have something in common. Finding similar touch points can help conversation and bonding go smoother and faster. And it also prevents networking faux pas (I once slammed a show to someone who produced it. That's where I learned to 1) never slam a show and 2) always do research). If you're going to a party or event and you know some of the players attending, see what you can dig up on 'em before you go. Networking is so much easier when you have conversation starters.

DON'T FLY SOLO

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In *Top Gun*, Tom Cruise had his wing man and so should you. Networking is super hard to do by yourself, so don't do it. Find someone to hit the streets with you so you can help each other out with introductions, follow up, etc. When I was in college, I remember trying to get out there and meet new people. And I ended up standing in the corner of a bar in the West Village, sipping on a coke, wondering why people weren't talking to me. But when I grabbed a buddy one week later and went to the same bar and we started having fun by ourselves, you'd be surprised at how many people came over to us! And the fear of approaching others all but evaporated with two of us to carry the nerves. If you're an introvert like me, and you're afraid to talk to people, find someone who isn't and take them with you.

AIM LOWER TO GET HIGHER

Having trouble getting a meeting with that someone who you know can make a difference with your project? Stop trying. Get a meeting with someone who knows that someone and go from there. It seems like the first words out of everyone's mouths these days when you ask how they are is, "Busy. So busy!" So while you might think it is easy for Cameron Mackintosh to take fifteen minutes for you or that agent to just return your call, it's just not. So maybe you'd be better off trying to network with someone who is more accessible so that they can give you the almighty referral later on.

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NETWORKING IS A JOB

It's crucial. I'm pretty content with what I've been able to do with my career so far, but I tell you this . . . if I had been a better networker when I was younger, I'd be in a much different position than I'm in now. But listen . . . it's never too late to start, for you or for me. The key is to recognize how essential it is. And then to take steps to improve your skills.

In fact, I'm going to leave you with something I forced myself to do several years ago that helped my networking chops, and I guarantee it can help you too. It's "The Ken Networking Challenge!" Ready? Here we go.

Start a conversation with at least one person you don't know every day.

Simple, right? And that person can be anyone. Someone on the subway or in the elevator. Wherever. And the question can be about anything! Just ask someone for the time (even if you don't need it). Ask someone where they got their jacket. Ask someone for directions or a recommendation for a movie. And watch what happens. The first few days, if you're like me, you'll ask and run. And then, about a week in, you'll find yourself throwing in a reply or two . . . or figuring out the right way to ask to get a response.

And the cool thing about "The Ken Networking Challenge" is that not only will your networking skills improve (along with your confidence), I bet you'll meet some really cool people in the process. And all without touching a keyboard.