



Anchor Your Networking with Strong Relationships

Use strategic associations to keep your business afloat during economic storms.

By Ivan Misner | September 10, 2009

This summer, our family took a small-ship tour of the Great Barrier Reef near Australia. The first night we were on the ship, we noticed that the anchor used to secure our vessel in the middle of the Coral Sea was quite small compared to the size of the ship.

On the second night, very strong winds came up. Our captain started the engines and backed the ship up to let out more length of the chain connected to the anchor. Curious (and, I must admit, a bit concerned), I asked him how it was possible for such a small anchor to hold the ship in place with the winds blowing against it so strongly.

“It is the chain that is holding the ship, not the anchor,” he informed me. After the anchor is lowered, the captain looks to the first mate, who signals from the prow the direction in which the chain is laying. The captain then maneuvers the ship into the right position and lets out the necessary amount of chain to hold the ship.

Well, I began to see how this dynamic was relevant to networking. The anchor of any good networking program is the system, the process of doing business through relationships. But it’s not the system or the process that has the strength--it’s the length of the chain (the relationships) holding the networking program in place!

As you take a look at the networking groups you may be participating in, think about the links, or relationships, you have formed with the individual members. How many links does your chain have? Do you have strong relationships with many of the other members of the group, or are you closely linked with a select few, but disconnected and detached from others?

So, how do you go about letting out more chain during times when the economic winds have strengthened against your businesses? I submit that it’s time to get serious about developing stronger relationships with each and every member of the networking groups you participate in. This includes people who you don’t think have the contacts you might want or perhaps are in a business that’s not exactly symbiotic with yours.

Have you ever thought to do one-on-ones with those people as well? Spend the time to do one-on-ones with each and every active member of your network--it helps you develop a longer and stronger chain. Think of each person in your network as one of the links that lengthen that chain.

The wisdom of laying more chain to strengthen the ability of the anchor to hold strong is critical for the success of your personal network.

Another important aspect of this anchoring process is watching the first mate. Look for networking organizations with leaders who are qualified to signal the direction the chain is lying as the dynamic in your group changes.

These organization leaders should be able to signal what adjustments need to be made to ensure your network is pointed in the right direction. At one point during our tour, the first mate literally dove into the water to loosen the chain where it had become hooked on a coral formation. You need qualified people in your personal network who are willing to dive in to help lead a network in the right direction.

Starting this week, try to make the development of your “relationship chain” within your personal network your primary focus. I guarantee those relationships will be what anchor your business and your networking efforts in the long run despite economic fluctuations. The old adage that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link is just as true for a ship as it is for a business network.

Called the “father of modern networking” by CNN, Dr. Ivan Misner is a New York Times bestselling author. He is the founder and chairman of BNI, the world’s largest business networking organization. His latest No.1 bestseller is *The 29% Solution*. Dr. Misner is also the Sr. Partner for the Referral Institute, an international referral training company.