

## Letter from the Executive Director



In June, I spoke at IRN's annual NetFest event about networking. I showed a written copy of my speech to Chamber President Jim Riedl and he thought my insights would be valuable to the membership and said that I should put it in the newsletter. So here is part of my speech, "The Long & Winding Road of Networking."

How many of you have had more than one job during your adult life? More than 3 jobs? More than 6? I have had 12 different jobs, at 10 different companies in 3 different cities. My job as Executive Director of the Rocky River Chamber of Commerce is by far the best job I've ever had. Why do I like it so much? Because it's all about connecting people and helping people do business. I'm like a matchmaker for businesspeople, which is really rewarding!

I used to think, "What is wrong with me? Why can't I find a job that's right for me?" But since I took the job at the Rocky River Chamber of Commerce I've realized that I have learned something from every single one of those jobs that I am now applying to my job today.

- My job as Membership Director at the association that produces the Seattle Boat Show taught me so much about membership, as well as working with a volunteer Board of Directors. I also apply what I learned at the Seattle Boat Show to the Chamber's Business Expo.
- My jobs at TV & radio stations and at an ad agency have taught me a lot about marketing, as well as how to speak the language w/ media reps when we buy advertising for Chamber events.
- In a job at a small start-up in Seattle I had to do payroll, which has been helpful in choosing a payroll service at the Chamber and dealing with members who work in the payroll business.
- My job at the Nordstrom corporate office in the IT department taught me a lot about computers, so now about 7 times out of 10, I can resolve the computer problems in the Chamber office.
- My job as an event planner taught me so much about planning quality events and thinking an event through from beginning to end, which helps me with our monthly luncheons, Taste of River, the Business Expo and other Chamber events.

Just as my past jobs have helped me moving forward, so have my past connections.

Who here is on LinkedIn? When I was looking for a job in Chicago, in 1993, long before LinkedIn or even internet use existed, I made a list of everyone I knew. I called everyone and said, "Who do you know in Chicago?" And then I made a list underneath that person. It was very time consuming, but I really enjoyed it. Turned out that the program director I worked with at WOIO-TV here in Cleveland connected me with a media rep in Chicago, so I set up an informational meeting with him and he suggested I contact the director of Media Research at the Leo Burnett ad agency, which I did and she hired me. What I was doing was an old fashioned paper version of LinkedIn.

Every time I left a job, I tried to keep peace with the people I was leaving behind. I kept the employee phone lists and when LinkedIn became a part of my life, I pulled out those phone lists and connected with so many of those past co-workers. Being LinkedIn to one of those past co-workers helped me find a job in Seattle. I read an article in the newspaper about a start-up and was determined to get a job there. I searched LinkedIn for that

company name and found that someone I worked with at a radio station in Seattle was linked to the owner of the company. She put us in touch and I got the job.

I've been networking for many years, but I never really knew it until I realized the importance of it when I started working at the Chamber. **Every single person** I've encountered in my life is a vehicle for networking. So many of the new members I've brought in to the Chamber are through connections I've made throughout my life....a friend of my brother's or the brother of a friend, a classmate, someone from my old neighborhood in Lakewood or an old colleague. Whenever I meet someone around here, before talking business I try to find a common connection, usually I can get to just 2 or 3 degrees of separation. That's the beauty of living in a smaller city and one of the reasons I'm glad I moved back here.

**Networking is far-reaching and takes time.** Every interaction with a new person can be a golden opportunity. It frustrates me when I hear people say that they didn't get any new business at a particular event. A banker recently told me they didn't get any new customers at our Business Expo, they wanted to walk away from the event w/ new checking accounts opened, which to me is a very short-sighted way to think about networking. **Networking is not about instant results.** If you take advantage of the opportunities to meet and develop relationships with as many people as possible, you might find that someone's sister, cousin, neighbor or colleague could become a potential new client someday. **Every connection could open a door and provide an opportunity.**

Some people are in businesses where networking can be instant, for example if you sell cupcakes or wine. But for many people I meet, they're selling something that people only decide upon just a few times in their lifetime...like a bank, payroll company, insurance agent, title company or remodeler. Chances are good you're not going to make a decision about a major service provider based on one encounter with a salesperson....that is why building relationships is so important. People need to build trust in you. Then when the time arrives for one of your connections to make a decision to choose someone in your field, they already know they'd like to do business with you. This could be a year or two down the road.

**Again, networking takes time.**

What you get out of membership in the Chamber of Commerce, IRN or any networking organization depends on how much you put into it. It's like when I go to Weight Watchers...I'm not going to lose weight just by sitting at the meetings, I've tried that and it doesn't work, I have to take action when I walk out the door of the meeting. At the Chamber, we have a calendar FULL of events where our members can connect with other members and guests. But connections aren't going to be made if you're not there, fully present and making an effort to meet new people. Even talking with a person you met at a previous event can help to build a stronger trusting relationship with that person. It takes time to trust.

I suspect that you all know this already and that is why you are here. And I'm so glad to see so many of you here. The more ENGAGED people we have in our business community, then the stronger our community becomes and that is beneficial to all of us. So **thank you** for being here and strengthening our business community.

Sincerely,

Liz Manning  
Executive Director

