

Networking: Different Strokes For Different Folks



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Have you ever wondered how people got into jobs that you never saw advertised? The latest research shows that only 20% of employment opportunities are advertised in Australia. Networking accounts largely for the remaining 80% of job placements. Whether it's an executive recruitment firm search, word of mouth referral or someone's nextdoor neighbour's brother - the job is often filled by someone known by someone else.

One of the challenges we face in Australia is that women are not encouraged to self promote. They often face ridicule and criticism for being pushy and many women are reluctant to stand out from the crowd or try to be noticed.

As a result women are overlooked because no one knows how good they are or what actual skills they have, and because they are not visible or well known by the decision makers, really competent women often see someone of less ability promoted above them.

But I do see a change happening. While at Orijen we view networking as a major outcome from our mentoring programs and build in sessions to enable women to connect with each other, I have also noticed that women are joining others like themselves to talk shop in online discussions, book clubs and other non-traditional venues.

Why? Because many popular ways to network (cocktail-hour gatherings, business-card exchanges or sports events) aren't suited to women's schedules or tastes. Women prefer to develop relationships in more intimate talks and then get down to business, whereas men focus on business and may never form personal bonds. Since women are often the primary caregivers at home, it's also easier for them to fit in smaller discussion groups that meet evenings or weekends.

The traditional white-male style of networking doesn't necessarily work for women, so we're carving out our own way of connecting. While women are welcome in networking groups that include men, they often don't find the personal connection they seek in those discussions. Men and women do it differently. Men post a question and someone

gives the answer... full stop! Women prefer to talk about life and non-work stuff as well as work problems and solutions.

The past three months have seen an explosion in the use of social networking sites by Australians as more women join them, a new report from Nielsen Online has found (www.smh.com.au/news/web/). Just Google "women networks" and you'll find a vast range, all of which provide opportunities for women to connect. Sphinx is one such website (www.sphinx.org), where members pay no charge to join and can post daily messages related to their professional and personal needs.

Book clubs have emerged as another networking opportunity for women. As one of my colleagues found: "my book club turned out to be good for business although it wasn't created for that. The reason: the women get to know each other as people first. I believe that people do business with people they like. Every other meeting is now devoted to nonbook discussions because participants were talking about these topics instead of about books. Intimate communications happen in a book club, because you are talking about personal experiences. I can't imagine men sharing as much."

So it's no longer about playing golf and attending sporting matches... women are doing it their way and with great success. As author Harvey Mackay says: "it's not who you know, but who knows what you know".

Check out some excellent networking links for women here:

<http://www.orijen.com.au/constructive-mentoring-resources.aspx>