

The Network Effect

A practical guide to making – and keeping – the connections that make your, our and everyone else's world go round. By Tony Newton & Judith Perle

This isn't the first book to be written on the subject of networking – and it certainly won't be the last. But what makes it stand out is the way it combines theory and practice, and treats its readers as intelligent and thinking people.

Almost all of us pay lip service to the truism that networking is crucial – to finding a job, advancing your career, becoming a leader or entrepreneur and, of course, in sales and business development. The trouble is that all too many of us find excuses not to network: "Yes, I know networking is absolutely crucial, but I'm really busy today, I'll find time tomorrow." Or "I hate doing it. I feel uncomfortable 'working the room' at conferences and I can't bear walking into a room full of strangers."

The book seems to be based on two premises: networking is (or should be) more about giving than getting; and everybody can learn how to do it, and how to do it well. Tony and Judith's experience of running workshops and masterclasses comes in useful – they know how to address most (if not all) of the barriers that people erect, and they have a myriad of case studies to draw on.

In businesslike fashion, they begin by presenting data to prove the power of networking in an attempt to banish procrastination. Did you know, for instance, that the network is the source of around a quarter of jobs for graduates of top UK business schools such as London Business School and Säid? There's then an explanation of current research into how networks actually operate. If, for instance, you understand what is meant by 'the power of weak ties', you'll also understand the importance of extending your network and making new connections.

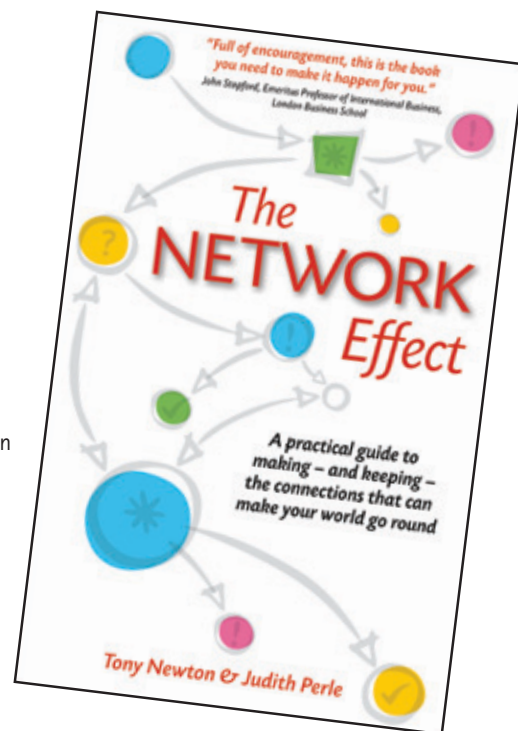
I've always looked at networking in terms of what I can give to others, rather than what I might gain from them, so it was reassuring to find that Tony and Judith devote a chapter to what you might call the etiquette of networking. As they say, developing a reputation as someone who knows interesting people, and who is willing to help out, is possibly the most valuable resource you can

acquire.

The meat of the book takes you through the process of connecting with people, step-by-step. How do you start (and end) conversations? Remember people's names? Build rapport? Stay in touch and foster that all-important trust? What tips and tricks can you add to your toolbox? I particularly liked the idea (gleaned from a bishop – it seems that even those in high places sometimes need to push themselves to network) of setting yourself a target of meeting four new people at an event by approaching someone in each of the four corners of the room. And if starting conversations is just too difficult, the authors suggest that you practice in low-key environments such as the supermarket or post office queue. The worst that can happen, after all, is that a stranger thinks you're a bit odd!

The book is peppered with real-life case studies. One of the anecdotes that appealed to me relates to what is commonly called the 'elevator pitch' (though this isn't a term I warm to, as it strongly implies that you are selling something rather than telling someone what you do in a way that makes them want to continue chatting to you). A common mistake, according to Tony and Judith, is to use lots of technical language or jargon (perhaps in an unconscious attempt to sound more impressive). Instead, they suggest, ask yourself whether a ten year old would understand what you were talking about. Not because we should talk down to people, but because what we say should interest and engage the layman as well as the expert.

They give the example of Craig. In the past, when people asked him what he did, he told them "I'm a financial controller in BT, supporting the Group HQ directors and working on a project to streamline BT Finance." That might be appropriate for a conversation with another telecoms expert but many (most?) people would also find it off-putting. Instead, during a workshop exercise, Craig came up with this: "I help BT save money by measuring us against the best in our industry and



helping to improve things."

As the authors say, we're all different and not every technique works equally well for everyone. But their approach should help you to build your network in a way that feels comfortable, genuine and rewarding.

The ending is perhaps the weakest part of the book – in so far as the authors deal with social media only sketchily. Although I can understand the rationale (that this area changes so rapidly that anything they might have written would almost instantly be out of date), it still feels like a relative weakness. But nobody's perfect, after all.

In short, *The Network Effect* is a practical, readable guide to building business relationships. There's an unusual 'marriage' of theory and practice and lots of 'try this' suggestions and anecdotes. If you need to polish your networking technique – and to be honest, who doesn't? – this book will prove invaluable.

Review by Steven Leof, Business Development Director at Softtek.

There's more information about the book at www.TheNetworkEffect.co.uk, and you can find out about Tony and Judith's workshops at www.ManAdvan.com