

What do the Fourth of July and In-person Networking Have in Common? by Lillian D. Bjorseth

As we get ready to celebrate the birth of the United States of America, I want to remind you there is a strong connection between the holiday and in-person networking.

Gen. Israel Putnam, who commanded the Revolutionary Army at the Battle of Bunker Hill and helped pave the way for the Declaration of Independence, said the oft-repeated words, “Men, you are all marksmen – don’t one of you fire until you see the white of their eyes.” The best way by far to start relationships is also to see the white of someone’s eyes.

Lest I be misunderstood in this age of online networking (I won’t call it online social networking because face-to-face is definitely social, too!), I want to share immediately that both methods are important and compatible. In-person, however, can be effective in and of itself. Meeting someone online frequently does not stand alone.

Face-to-face took a back seat as people clamored to become part of the online connected generation. In fact, one person I asked to do a testimonial for the new third edition of *Breakthrough Networking: Building Relationships That Last* a year ago said, “Sure, even though you talk mostly about old-fashioned networking.” I sought other testimonials!

My increasing requests for speaking engagements on face-to-face techniques lead me to believe people again realize the value of this form of networking to increase sales, find a job and build solid relationships. Another trend in the Chicago area is that LinkedIn groups that appear to have been formed strictly online are now having in-person events. Doesn’t surprise me!

In-person networking is the safest, most effective, easiest and preferred way to begin accumulating the kind of wealth you need throughout your life: social capital, i.e., a large network of knob turners to open doors to whatever you are seeking.

- **Live interaction.** About 90 percent of in-person communication is conveyed through nonverbal actions. Your walk, posture, handshake, eye contact, facial expressions and appearance as well as your tone, rate, pitch, speed and inflection share volumes with those who are astute people readers. This form of communication is missing online. Underlines, bold and exclamation marks can’t replace a smile, a furrowed brow or a firm handshake. Words account for only 10 percent. Online, they have to work super hard to compensate for what else is missing.
- **Telephone calls.** If someone you want to meet is geographically inaccessible, the *second best thing* is to spend quality time with her/him on the telephone because you can at least engage the person in an interactive conversation and hear voice modularities.
- **The knowledge and trust factors.** You do business with people you know and trust or people referred by people you know and trust. Both ingredients are established more quickly when you meet face-to-face. Would you rather do business with someone your associate refers after meeting her/him in person ... or online? It’s difficult to engender trust based on your LinkedIn profile alone. (Who

monitors that the information is factual?) The profile, however, can be a great way to enhance information you already received or generate interest in setting up a live meeting.

- **Honesty and integrity.** You can much more easily see that people are who they say they are and how they portray themselves when you see the white of their eyes. You also gain valuable information by listening and observing.
- **Immediacy of decision-making.** One of the early decisions you make is whether it is worth pursuing a mutually beneficial relationship. It is far easier to do in person as you share your “ask for” questions and measure responses against your “listen for” answers. Ask-for questions help you determine if the person is a first-degree candidate to help grow your business or further your career or a second-degree candidate because s/he knows someone who can help you or vice versa. “Listen-for” answers alert you if the person has relationship potential because s/he plays in your ballpark.
- **Memorability.** People remember you much more easily when they have met you in person. An online photo or video is helpful; however, it’s not like looking you in the eye and shaking your hand. Ensure your personal encounters are meaningful to gain top-of-mind positioning in your subject area.
- **Increased online contacts.** Increased personal contacts will also help you increase your online contacts since many of you link only with people you know. You become more valuable as the size and quality of your network grows.

Once you have invested the time and effort in face-to-face meetings, you can use online networking to stay in touch and strengthen your relationships. That’s where the two methods fit hand-in-glove.

May your Fourth of July celebrations lead to many sparkling relationship successes!



Lillian Bjorseth is a renowned Chicago-area, in-person networking keynoter, trainer, coach & author. She was named 2009 Outstanding Chicago Speaker and 2010 NSA-IL Member of the Year. Read more about Lillian on her speaker and expert pages.