



Networking Series Part III: Networking for Nursing Introverts

Diane E. Scott, RN, MSN

“As a nurse, I rarely have problems talking to patients or families, but I really have difficulty making small talk with other professionals. To begin with, I rarely see other nurses outside my department. When I am at a meeting or a social function with people I don’t know, I am exhausted when I get home. As an introvert, how can I learn to network?”

This statement echoes the thoughts and feelings of many nurses across the nation. According to businesspundit.com, 70% of the world’s population are extroverts. For the remaining 30%, making important professional connections through networking is a difficult but vital step to career enhancement and growth. Talented and gifted nursing professionals who do not learn the skills for successful networking may never have the opportunities to showcase their knowledge or help others with their experiences.

Whether you are an introvert or an extrovert, networking is important. Successful networking involves meeting new people and dialoging with them. You need to be able to develop professional relationships with others that are mutually beneficial, and networking allows you to open the doors to form those relationships.

To an extrovert, this type of interaction may seem natural. Conversely, introverts may be horrified of the thought of talking to a stranger or uncomfortable at promoting themselves. Fortunately, introverts can develop skills for networking. Here are some tips that may help:

Making Networking a Habit

Meghan Wier is the author of "Confessions of an Introvert: The Shy Girl's Guide to Career, Networking and Getting the Most Out of Life." She suggests that people need to think of networking as part of your job. Regardless of how busy your life is, set goals to network on a routine basis. She states that sending emails to past coworkers, fellow students or past bosses can reestablish great contacts- even if the email is just to say "hello."

The Art of Small Talk

Nancy Fenn, of introvertzcoach.com, coaches introverts to start by learning how to initiate small talk. By using basic opening lines, such as "What's new?" or asking a person a question about themselves, you are using a mechanism that allows the larger populations of extroverts to talk about themselves. Extroverts, she concurs, enjoy being asked questions about themselves and more introverted people are their perfect audience. She states, "In some cases, people will wind up thinking you're a fascinating person because in your presence they hear themselves say fascinating things."

Fenn suggests compiling a list of opening statements and questions that are "small enough" that no one is antagonized and is geared to include as many people as possible. She recommends avoiding topics such as religion and politics so that others can join the conversation.

The Center for American Nurses is a professional association whose mission is to create a community of nursing organizations that serve individual, non-union nurses by providing programs, tools and policies that address challenges and opportunities in their practice environments.

Networking at Conferences

For nurses who are extroverts, conferences or meetings are a prime opportunity to get to meet and reestablish connections with others. However, if you are an introverted nurse, groups of unfamiliar people can be very uncomfortable. To make the most of a conference, choose the venues you are most comfortable with when selecting break-out sessions. To some introverts, large groups may be more comfortable because they offer anonymity, but, to others, small break out sessions are much less intimidating.

Regardless of the room size, use the conference to practice small talk. Find a person who is alone and sit next to them during a session. Try asking where they are from or what their specialty is. Every opportunity you get to meet someone at the conference is a chance to establish a new relationship.

Use Email

Penelope Trunk's article, *Networking for introverts: A 5-step plan*, published on BankRate.com, suggests that introverts use email as a way of making connections. She stated the advantages of being able to "write and rewrite your message until it's right" and not having to worry about saying something silly and inappropriate to a person. While the closeness of a personal meeting may be lost by using the Internet, she suggests compensating by sending an extra email to the person to establish a connection.

Helping Others

Trunk also suggests that helping others is an excellent way of collecting a team of contacts. For instance, sending leads to others for jobs or projects is an excellent way of reaching out to others. People are grateful for leads that help them and will

often reciprocate in some manner in the future.

While there are a myriad of resources that teach various networking techniques for both introverts and extroverts, the consensus is that the biggest mistake is to avoid networking altogether. Regardless of whether you are an introvert or an extrovert, making networking part of your career journey is vital to your career and your experience and expertise benefits others.

Regardless of where you are in your nursing career, we hope that you will benefit from this series as well as the other products and services offered at the Center for American Nurses. For more information, please contact the Center at www.centerforamericannurses.org.

References

Business Pundit.com (2006). *How to network: For introverts*. Retrieved July 11, 2007, from http://www.businesspundit.com/50226711/how_to_network_for_introverts.php

Fenn, Nancy (n.d) *How to chat someone up*. Retrieved July 11, 2007, from http://www.theintrovertcoach.com/networking_for_introverts.html

Trunk, Penelope. (2003) *Networking for introverts: A 5-step plan*. Retrieved July 11, 2007, from <http://www.bankrate.com/bnm/news/career/20031110a1.asp>

Wier, Meghan, (2005) *Confessions of an Introvert: The Shy Girl's Guide to Career, Networking and Getting the Most Out of Life*. Lincoln, iUniverse.