



# The Power of Networking

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Authored by:

Dyanne (Lagman) Smith, **The National Conference Center**

Contributing Research:

Kristina Bouweiri, **Reston Limousine**

Lyles Carr, **The McCormick Group**

Derek Coburn, **cadre**

Kelly Harris, **Lockheed Martin**

Tina Johnson, **JP Events & Consulting**

Diane Lunsford, **Continental Building Products**

John Potterton, **FMC Technologies**

Sharla Warren, **eventPower**

Tien Wong, **Tech 2000, Lore Systems, Opus8**

THE  
NATIONAL  
CONFERENCE  
CENTER®

18980 Upper Belmont Place  
Leesburg, VA 20176-1245

Phone: 877.363.3108

Fax: 703.729.5382

[conferencecenter.com](http://conferencecenter.com)

## The Power of Networking

What comes to mind when you hear the word “networking?” One might immediately associate it with an event of some sort; an opportunity to exchange business cards while sipping on a crisp glass of wine or a cold beer. You meet a few people; engage in small talk, hoping to spark a great conversation that might eventually lead into something bigger. The natural, extroverted pro-networker feeds off the energy from the crowd, while for some; the concept of “working the room” does not come naturally. Networking means different things to different people. Too often, networking becomes generalized or misconstrued, losing its effectiveness and value; however, the more that business professionals dissect the concept and approach it strategically, they learn the power that fuels it and have a little fun in the process.

### What It Is and What It Isn't

Lyles Carr, Vice President of the McCormick Group defines networking as the process of cultivating people who can be helpful both professionally and personally. What it isn't, he says, is marketing or business development. “Networking comes before marketing—it's about building the army, recruiting the allies and being prepared for any action,” said Carr. Research precedes networking. As time remains the most



valuable commodity, preparation and thorough, sound research enables you to make the most of your interactions. “Cast a net. Know who the key players are. Research properly. Go back to grassroots, set a criteria and determine a process of elimination,” said Diane Lunsford, Executive Assistant at Continental Building Products. A targeted approach gets you in front of the right person—the person in charge of what you want.

With the amount of online resources readily available to us on our desktops and smart phones, blindly attending events and “hoping for the best” becomes obsolete. We must remind ourselves that social media does not replace face-to-face networking but

instead is a supplement and provides the tools for instantaneous two-way communication. Companies have continued to leverage technology as a way to engage attendees prior to events. Sharla Warren, Vice President of Conference Services at eventPower, says that the use of mobile applications and partnership systems has broken down the barriers to entry, enabling attendees to connect before conferences on various areas of interests. Mobile applications such as Trip Builder and Double Dutch allow professionals to connect before the event and stay connected during and after, while allowing hosts to optimize their events and engage directly.

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“Networking is an art and requires work, practice, concentration and good habits. It’s asking who is going to be there, what do I want to accomplish and what do I want to walk away with?” said John Potterton, Operations Manager at FMC Technologies. Potterton makes reference to Laura Schwartz who worked for the Clinton Administration for eight years, most notably as the White House Director of Events. In her book *Eat, Drink and Succeed*, Schwartz noted that Clinton would say “it’s show time” before stepping foot into any event, indicating his focus—he knew the people who would be there, he came with the intent of forming relationships and he made his time purposeful.

Networking and sales simply do not have the same meaning. While networking provides an opportunity to “sell yourself,” introductions should be sincere and tactful. Carr suggests coming up with a more inclusive introductory line. “Instead of asking where someone works,

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ask ‘What has you the most engaged today?’ It shifts the focus to them. Often you hear what they’re most passionate about,” said Carr. “As part of your elevator speech, instead of concentrating on the service you provide, consider what you have to offer the person or group. How can you help?”

Derek Coburn, founder of the “un-networking” group and author of *Networking Is Not Working* describes the three tiers of networking:

**NETWORKING 1.0** is going to an event with the intent of getting business.

**NETWORKING 2.0** is asking “What can I do for you?” or “How can I help you?”

**NETWORKING 3.0** is about how you can connect someone-- being able to identify what challenge you can help solve and if you can be a good resource.

Coburn’s approach is to find out what’s going on in the other person’s world and how he can essentially act as an extension of his client’s business development and marketing. He practices “un-networking,” a term

inspired from one of his favorite books *UnMarketing* by Scott Stratten. “Un is different from not. In order to be effective, you need to unlearn everything you’ve learned about networking,” said Coburn. Coburn has brought together a community of 100+ C-level executives, all with the shared commitment for helping and advocating for one another. To create the most conducive environment for meeting like-minded individuals and forming relationships, Coburn focuses on non-traditional ways to bring professionals together, whether it is encouraging clients to invite guests—allowing an opportunity to meet people in other’s circles or holding small, intimate sessions with member-led presentations. This approach enables professionals to strengthen existing relationships and ascertain the value they can offer to others.

Coburn uses triggering events as a method of identifying opportunities for others. As a partner at a wealth management firm, he uses the dialogue between him and his fitness trainer as an example. Coburn

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recognizes that they come from two seemingly different career fields so instead of plainly saying “I work for a wealth management firm,” he says “A good person for me to talk to is someone that is planning to sell their business in a couple of years.” By articulating his specialty, the trainer is now able to take those nuggets of information and easily refer people to him. The more we understand triggering events, the more we will be able to help others make connections, thus enabling ourselves to easily connect to the right people.

### There’s no “I” in team

Networking requires teamwork. Kelly Harris, Corporate Engagement Expert at Lockheed Martin, encourages professionals to not only be cognizant of personal strengths but also challenge what you may consider to be your weakness. “Work as a team. Have a talker and listener at the same table. Don’t undervalue the quiet people at the table but do give them a task.” Leveraging both dynamics create energy, enthusiasm and interest.

Kristina Bouweiri, President & CEO of Reston Limousine, saw her company triple in size because of networking. Kristina generated \$4 million in revenue for the first 10 years, although she admits she stayed in her office. After 9/11, the phones stopped

ringing and Kristina realized she had to get out and network. Through savvy business skills, strong relationships and steadfast networking, Reston Limousine today posts revenues of \$18 million and has been nationally and globally recognized as a premier transportation provider. In 2008, Bouweiri created Sterling Women, a networking group showcasing women-owned businesses in Northern Virginia. Held monthly at The National Conference Center, the event aims to draw women who do not normally network and who are employed by some of Loudoun’s larger businesses. By providing women executives and professionals an opportunity to hear inspiring life stories and showcase their businesses, Sterling Women has grown its database to 8,000 women, with more than 100 member testimonials. One aspect of the luncheon that has been incredibly well-received is the lineup of unique guest speakers who come

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*- Tina Johnson*

*JP Events & Consulting*

with interesting stories, including trials and tribulations of how their business came to fruition. It is the humility of these successful women and willingness to be direct and “human,” that attracts members.

### Logistics matter

As a host venue or planner of events, the ability to create such an environment that encourages synergy must also be strategic. Tina Johnson, President & CEO of JP Events & Consulting, who launched the Virginia Women’s Business Conference with Bouweiri in 2008, has brought over 500+ women together to discover the tools for success, make strategic business connections and leave feeling empowered to take action. Held annually at The National Conference Center, the one-day event features a host of distinguished speakers, topical breakout sessions and workshops and also recognizes one “Stellar Woman” for their achievements in business, support of women, and contributions to community. With her experience in planning an array of small to large events, Johnson believes in customizing to the audience to yield measurable results. “For association type events, we try to provide event ambassadors or a host. Their job is to greet guests as they enter the event, introduce new members to

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established members and answer questions about the organization,” said Johnson. To spark conversation and help with opening dialogue for shy guests, Johnson suggests adding an interesting tidbit about the attendees to the badges. “At my last event, I had on my badge ‘I want to learn to ride a motorcycle’—it provided for some interesting conversations,” said Johnson. In the opening remarks, Johnson suggests including a thought-provoking question such as “What person in history do you most admire and why?” This approach strays from the typical business jargon, allowing for more authentic—again, human, dialogue.

### Post event

You came, you networked, did you conquer? On both sides of the spectrum, whether an attendee or the event host, one thing rings true—networking is a process and the

reward is in following up. Entrepreneur Tien Wong recalls a conversation with a fellow entrepreneur of a major clothing apparel line. After making a suggestion on a particular item from the line, Wong received a Fedex package some days later filled with the apparel gear. The more creative, thoughtful and personal the follow-ups, the more impactful—keeping you top-of-mind and setting you apart from competitors. “Keep your promises and don’t be hard to get ahold of,” said Wong. The more practice, the less foreign the concept of networking seems. Wong recalls being at the same event as Mortimer Zuckerman, co-founder of Boston Properties, media proprietor and owner of New York Daily News, U.S. News & World Report and former owner of The Atlantic and Fast Company. As a 23 year old, new college graduate, Wong stood among his peers, a group of

young professionals. Being an avid subscriber of all his magazines, he made it a point to introduce himself to Zuckerman. Wong’s “fearlessness” in talking to successful people has helped build confidence and open doors both personally and professionally.

“Practice on people you feel comfortable with. Seek brutally honest and constructive feedback from colleagues. Let them know what you are trying to achieve. Your peers are the hardest sell to make,” said Lunsford. “It is equally important to know your own communication style—certain mannerisms, phrases and expressions.”

Whatever networking means to you—you must define the purpose for it to be effective. Networking has afforded business professionals countless opportunities, whether it was learning of a new career opportunity, gaining a great referral or securing resources to help a worthy cause. The more preparation and wisdom you can offer, the more you receive. In the hustle and bustle of our day to day, we tend to focus more on profiting versus what we can do for others. By networking in such a way that is strategic, well thought out and human—the more we can gain, by making something possible that may be otherwise limited or impossible to another.



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The following are simple reminders of how to maximize your experiences:

### The Do's

- Do have a goal set and know who you want to meet prior to attending. Come prepared with business cards but only give to a person that you can either help or that you feel has a strong interest in your product or service. – *Tina Johnson*
- Do arrive early and practice your elevator speech. Explain what kind of problems you solve, what you bring to clients in 30 seconds or less. – *Tien Wong*
- Do only ask for a business card if you feel you can contribute. There's no prize for how many business cards you can collect! – *Lyles Carr*
- Do less talking and more listening! We love to hear ourselves talk. Show interest. You draw interest when you show interest. – *Diane Lunsford*
- Do dress for success and air on the side of conservatism. Remember that you represent your company. – *Tien Wong*
- Do practice permission networking. Blind introductions result in lost credibility. – *Derek Coburn*
- Do make it a point to humanize the conversation. Connect, listen and engage. Make sure you hear their answers. – *Kelly Harris*
- Do remember to pay it forward. – *Diane Lunsford*
- Do keep your promises and be dependable. Write a handwritten thank you note! But, consider different kind of follow up based on the relationship. Someone is always paying attention. – *Lyles Carr*

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- Do remember there is nothing wrong about being strategic about where you network. – *Lyles Carr*
- Do remember networking is a good first step—be prepared for the long term. – *John Potterton*

### The Don'ts

- Don't sell your service the first time you meet them. – *Kristina Bouweiri*
- Don't focus on the people you know, use the people you know to connect with other people. – *Lyles Carr*
- Don't ask for the order upfront "Can we meet for coffee?" No. – *Tien Wong*
- Don't drink too much alcohol. Limit yourself to one drink or none at all. Eat before you go. – *Tien Wong*
- Don't think people are going to judge you. Don't be afraid to approach new faces. – *Sharla Warren*
- Don't constantly look at your phone. Be present. – *Kelly Harris*
- Don't let your hair down and over indulge. – *Kelly Harris*
- Don't be afraid to cast a net. You never know whom people know. – *Diane Lunsford*
- Don't ignore social media. Leverage LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter to keep in touch afterward. – *Kristina Bouweiri*
- Don't forget you can't be all things to all people. – *Diane Lunsford*

**As a host facility or event planner, take the host facility to a different level and give attendees a unique, fulfilling experience, before, during and after the event. Potterton asks us to consider the 5 E's:**

**1. Enticing-** can you customize the space? Make the group feel like you understand their needs and that you are looking forward to their arrival.

**2. Entering-** this is the first experience. The people experience. Give your guests a warm welcome.

**3. Engaging-** maximize opportunities for engaging. You are the subject matter expert. Pay attention to body language and what people are seeing or hearing. Take note of what's making a good event good and use this knowledge for future events.

**4. Exiting-** again, there needs to be strategy. Be consistent and impactful. If you're considering goody bags, include something attendees will put to use.

**5. Extending-** Now that they have left, consider what you can do to help them remember you. Share photos if you took them.

### Meeting Discoveries: Spring 2014

Meeting Discoveries is a quarterly white paper series produced by The National Conference Center. Topics range from helping meeting planners produce more productive meetings to trends in the industry. The next edition of Meetings Discoveries will publish Summer 2014.

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*The National Conference Center (NCC) is a full-service conference center and one of the largest eco-friendly conference centers in the nation. In 2013, it was named "Best Venue" by the International Events Society. Located in Northern, Virginia, 12 miles from Dulles International Airport and 35 miles from Washington, DC, NCC has 917 guest rooms and over 250,000 square feet of meeting space. With 30 years of experience in the hospitality and meetings industry, The National Conference Center is managed by ARAMARK Conference Centers and has become a hub for productive meetings. For information, call 877.363.3108 or visit [www.conferencecenter.com](http://www.conferencecenter.com).*

***Dyanne (Lagman) Smith** is the Marketing Manager at The National Conference Center, acting as the "face" and "voice" of the conference center's online and offline marketing communications. Prior to joining NCC in January 2013, Smith was a Corporate Communication Specialist at Abraxas Corporation, a technology consulting firm in support of National Security, and previously supported Ntrepid Corporation in marketing, branding, project management, event planning and tradeshow coordination. Smith holds a B.A. in Communications with a minor in Public Relations from George Mason University and a Masters in Professional Studies in Public Relations and Corporate Communications from Georgetown University. She can be reached at [dsmith@conferencecenter.com](mailto:dsmith@conferencecenter.com).*

***Kristina Bouweiri** is president and CEO of Reston Limousine, Washington DC's premier chauffeured transportation provider and one of the top 20 largest operators in the nation. Starting with only five vehicles in 1990, Bouweiri diversified the business and grew it to an \$18 million firm today with more than 160 vehicles. As a woman in an industry traditionally dominated by male executives, Bouweiri has been committed to supporting women entrepreneurs over the years and is the founder of the monthly networking luncheon Sterling Women and co-founder of the annual Virginia Women's Business Conference. Recognized for her business acumen regionally and nationally, Bouweiri is an international speaker on topics ranging from startup success strategies to the use of social media in growing your business. Her recent awards include "2012 Business Leader of the Year" from the DC Chamber of Commerce, SmartCEO "Smart 100" and 2011 NOVA EXEC magazine's Top 20 Innovators. She can be reached at [kbouweiri@restonlimo.com](mailto:kbouweiri@restonlimo.com).*

***Lyles Carr** represents The McCormick Group with business and civic organizations in the Washington, DC region and nationally. Within the firm, he provides strategic guidance on projects to McCormick Group consultants and their clients, while also continuing his own active consulting practice. Carr serves on the Board of Directors of Social & Scientific Systems and on the Boards or Advisory Councils of numerous civic and nonprofit organizations such as The Economic Club of Washington, The Greater Washington Board of Trade, and ACT for Alexandria. A former Washingtonian magazine "Washingtonian of the Year", Carr was most recently recognized in the Washington Business Journal Power 100 list of the region's most influential business leaders. He can be contacted at [lcarr@tmg-dc.com](mailto:lcarr@tmg-dc.com).*

***Derek Coburn** is the co-founder and CEO of the un-networking community in Washington DC called cadre and the author of Networking is Not Working. He and his wife Melanie created cadre as a way for top-notch professionals to connect and develop meaningful relationships, efficiently and effectively, with the ultimate goal of working together to promote each other while adding value for their existing clients and network. Coburn is a Partner at Washington Financial Group. In this role, he leads his team to help coordinate all aspects of his clients' financial lives. Coburn is an alumnus of the Perdue School of Business at Salisbury University. He can be contacted at [Derek@cadredc.com](mailto:Derek@cadredc.com).*

***Kelly Harris** joined Lockheed Martin as the Manager of Corporate Protocol and Domestic Operations in February 2007. A graduate of the Protocol School of Washington Levels I and II and member of Protocol and Diplomacy International – Protocol Officers Association, she is responsible for guiding Lockheed corporate employees on current rules of conduct for customer and partner interactions. Prior, Harris worked for the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) and two regional law firms. Harris graduated from Northern Virginia University with a BSBA in marketing and emphasis in promotions. Harris can be contacted at [kelly.harris@lmco.com](mailto:kelly.harris@lmco.com).*

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**Tina Johnson** is President & CEO of JP Events & Consulting, a full service event management company, creating some of the region's most sought after corporate and private events. Tina founded the company over 21 years ago and has grown the company into a successful woman owned business. Johnson is also the co-founder of the Virginia Women's Business Conference, an annual event that draws in more than 500 attendees a year. On a philanthropic note, Johnson leverages her corporate event management expertise by giving back to the community, serving on the board of the Loudoun Abused Women's Shelter, Loudoun Chamber of Commerce, the Loudoun Convention & Visitors Association, the CEO Cabinet and past Chairman of Loudoun Interfaith Relief. She can be contacted at [tjohnson@jpevents.biz](mailto:tjohnson@jpevents.biz).

**Diane Lunsford** has supported the C-suite level of varied organizations throughout Northern Virginia for greater than a decade. She is disciplined and a perfectionist to a fault when it comes to being the quintessential "ambassador" for her "higher-ups". Even though the demands for her day job can be arduous at best from time-to-time, Diane also devotes the majority of her "after hours" to launching her writing career. She believes the ultimate key that links the goal of future successes is without question, "the power of networking and information sharing always." She can be contacted at [Diane.Lunsford@continental-bp.com](mailto:Diane.Lunsford@continental-bp.com).

For 27 years, **John Potterton** has served in leadership-level positions within the conference center, meetings and learning industries. John began his conference center career as Director of KPMG's conference centers in NY and Chicago. Today he is employed by FMC Technologies as Operations Manager in its corporate university. He recently helped the company open its first Learning Center in Houston, and is now focused on designing and building similar facilities in key locations around the globe. Throughout his career, Potterton has been an active member in the International Association of Conference Centers. He is a regular speaker, facilitator and moderator at IACC conferences, has served on IACC's board of directors and has been a board advisor evaluating conference centers on adherence to criteria expected in the operation of quality meeting and learning environments. Potterton can be contacted at [jpotterton@gmail.com](mailto:jpotterton@gmail.com).

**Sharla Warren** has 15 years of conference management experience and has been part of the eventPower (formerly Technology Forums) team since 2000. Sharla leads the Conference Services Department where her team is in charge of managing all client relationships. In addition to commercial and association clients, she has managed numerous government contracts. Prior to eventPower, Sharla worked at Cohn Communications, where she planned and sold exhibit space for PMEXPO, the largest one-day property management and real estate trade show in the nation. Sharla also supported event planning for the Property Management Association (PMA) and the Washington Area Council of Engineering Laboratories, Inc. (WACEL). She managed membership recruitment and retention and exhibited at trade shows promoting the PMA brand. Sharla also worked as the Administrator (Director) for the National Society Children of the American Revolution (N.S.C.A.R.). Sharla is a Certified Meeting Planner (CMP) and is a member of MPI and SGMP. She can be reached at [swarren@eventpower.com](mailto:swarren@eventpower.com).

**Tien Wong** is Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Tech 2000, Inc., a Herndon, Virginia-based provider of advanced technology training, mobile e-learning, and mobile content management software to Fortune 500, education and government clients. Wong also serves as the Chairman of Lore Systems, Inc, an IT professional services company and Opus8, a private investment and strategic advisory firm specializing in middle market buyouts and venture capitalist investments. He serves on the Board of Directors of the Maryland Venture Fund Authority, the Potomac Officer's Club, Washington DC Archangels, Founder Corps and cadre. Recognized as an international expert in CRM, direct marketing, and BPO, Wong was recently featured in The Washington Business Journal's Power 100 as one of the region's most influential leaders for the second year in a row. Wong can be contacted at [twong@t2000inc.com](mailto:twong@t2000inc.com).