



The Feed@ForbesWoman

## Are You Networking Or Self-Promoting?

ForbesWoman Community

Networking is a big theme for the ForbesWoman online community. Most agree with the common wisdom about networking--"It's a no-brainer if you want to get ahead," but [a recent thread](#) on the topic focuses on how making new connections is tricky for many professional women. While it's smart to network, there's a fine line between relationship-building and blatant self-promoting.

### The Thread

[Patricia Nixon](#), an information technology and services professional, begins with an example many women can relate to: "You meet a gentleman who is dressed right, smells good, isn't bad on the eyes and you strike up a conversation. Within minutes you want to escape. Why? Because his entire conversation centered on himself: He talked about his achievements, his career, awards he's received. He may be a charming guy, but with his introduction you'll never know. You're already looking for the exit signs."

Nixon wants to know: "Is that how you're networking? I've seen many discussions started on social-networking sites asking for help. The person posting might say she has a difficult boss and needs tips on how to handle her, the response might read: 'I had a difficult boss, too. That's why I started my own business. I now own xxx chains in 15 states and you can, too. Let me tell you how ...'"

### In Pictures: Seven Tips For Great Networking

What went wrong? Well, for one thing, says Nixon, the response is unhelpful and does not answer the question. It is also a real turn-off because it screams self-promotion. Its worst offense, though, is that it's ineffective and a lost opportunity.

"Because no matter how useful this person could be, he showed no consideration for the requester," writes Nixon. "She is only a prospect. And one would have to wonder, if this is how selfish he is in his approach, would this also be the behavior she'd be met with should they do business together?"

Imagine an opposite scenario where the requester is actually offered actionable advice. Nixon: "She'd be more inclined to view this person's profile, add him to her network and communicate in the future. *Now* there's an opportunity for self-promotion."

[Karen Kaufman](#), a designer, responds: "You've nailed it Patricia! LinkedIn predominantly feels like an enormous room full of people who are all wearing neon signs that link to their blog. They're not involved with conversing/getting to know one another because they're too busy adjusting their signage ... Shouldn't (I wish) what you wrote be common knowledge?"

Nixon replies, offering up her experiences with digital networking: "I've been on LinkedIn just about a month now, and in that time I have had hour-long telephone conversations with women not even in my own field. I didn't even initiate many of them; they came to me. And we talked like we'd known each other forever."

She also mentions that she helped one woman with her Web site ("for free"), and after proofreading another woman's blog, she got a job referral from her--"I had no idea she had such connections."

What went right? According to Nixon, networking--digital or otherwise--follows the same rules as the art of seduction: "If people aren't seeking you out from watching your interactions with others, you need to rethink your art and raise your game."

[Sonya Shelton](#), an executive coach and leadership and organization development consultant, weighs in: "Networking is about building relationships first, and if you're authentic, the promotion is a natural evolution. Relationships of any kind are like a teeter-totter. If one person keeps all the weight on their side, it's not very much fun for anyone."