In 2007 a major financial crisis occurred, leaving thousands of people out of work. A noted interviewer for CNN at the time was speaking live on television with a prominent life coach. The question was, “What do people have to do to network?” The answer was, “Get out and meet people.”

This simplistic response couldn’t have been worse advice. If this was in desperation the action you took, it likely ended in disaster. The reason being, you likely didn’t have a plan of attack that took in; Who, Why, What, When, Where and How.

Networking, like the golf swing, requires skill, adaptation, practice, discipline and execution. If you are starting to feel a little uncomfortable, welcome to my world as a student of the game of golf and what I go through in a golf lesson.

As a career/life coach and executive search consultant, allow me to pass onto you how we are going to up your game in advancing your career as a golf professional.

**WHAT IS NETWORKING?**
It is connecting individuals/groups who share something in common or want to do so.

**HOW DO WE NETWORK?**
It used to be that meeting people was primarily done in person and today it is done to a great degree online or by phone. However, when it comes to networking about your career, we want ultimately to achieve personal face time.

**IS NETWORKING ALL ABOUT SELLING OR SCHMOOZING?**
The greatest fear that exists with my clients is that they have to turn themselves into a salesperson. This is a fallacy! You need to be you, but often my clients need help in the messaging, the delivery and the expectations.

**WHY WOULD SOMEONE WHO DOESN’T KNOW ME, WANT TO SEE OR SPEAK WITH ME?**
This question comes up the most when you have been introduced to a third party who doesn’t know you. For example, you network with a friend about moving your career forward and he says he knows someone who can help. Your friend makes the connection by email, stating that you will call this third person.

The good news in this situation is that your friend has made an introduction and likely given the individual some background on yourself. Your starting position is to say, “I appreciate you taking the time and as my friend said, I am a… and I am looking to advance my career, and he said you would be a good person with whom to connect.” This can be done by email or phone, hopefully ending up in a personal meeting.

One of the great things about our country is that I have found that people are quite used to these approaches and as long as you realize that the person is doing you a favour and that time is precious, you should do fine.

**WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO TO GET READY TO NETWORK?**
Ask yourself these questions:

1. Why do you want to network?
2. What do you want to say about yourself?
3. Who do you want to network with?
4. How are you going to do it?
5. What are your expectations?
Now, let’s address each of these questions, so that you can start to work on your personal networking plan. You can’t make the connections until you have a plan!

**WHY?**

Most of my clients in both the golf business and business at large, come to me at a stage where they are stuck in their career. This is not necessarily a negative, particularly if you are at the early stages of feeling stuck, and don’t want to fall back.

It is important that you can state this feeling in a positive and constructive way. Nobody has time for a whiner!

Come up with a succinct statement like, “I have been an associate professional for the last five years at a great club, and feel I now have all the pieces to move on as a head professional.

**WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SAY ABOUT YOURSELF?**

In continuing with the same case, you may say, “My particular strengths are in... and I am looking to be a head professional in a club that could utilize these strengths. I am mobile and I want to start the process becoming better known to other professionals in my field”.

**WHO?**

It is absolutely critical to map out with whom you want to connect.

1. Who do you already know that you want to reconnect with and update?
2. Who are the people you would like to meet with but you have no connection?

In both cases, type out the list, and start to think about the next question, which is how are you going to make it happen.

**HOW?**

For those you know, pick what you think is the best way to reconnect—phone, email etc. Review the message and purpose you want to convey, and ideally aim for a personal meeting.

For those for whom you want to connect, note whom do you know that might make the connection for you?

Again, in contacting those people, review the message and purpose you want to convey. If you have no means of connection, leave those names alone for the time being as they may come up in your calls during the networking process.

**WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS?**

A networking call can be blown when the expectations of an outcome are unrealistic.

A good example of this is when a call has been set up for the purpose of creating awareness and getting the attention of someone and you end by saying “I hope you can find me my next job.” The meeting is over very abruptly.

I suggest setting minimal expectations and hope to be surprised.

**COMMON COURTESY?**

No matter how you connect with people, be warm, sincere, succinct and always say thank you for your time.

Now that you have a networking map, it is time to go practice. A good way to do this is pick someone who knows you well and take him or her through the steps. Maybe, even do a mock call. This way, you can get some constructive advice and get over the nervousness.

Last but not least, you will find that this plan and sticking with it should give you the information you are seeking to help you make better decisions about your career.

It is also a proactive approach so you avoid becoming the best-kept secret in town.

Remember, not all jobs are filled by postings or advertisements!

**ABOUT THE WRITTER**

Jim brings 35 years of Executive Search and HR Management consulting experience to his role as Senior Advisor of WMC. Jim specializes in executive search and coaching top level executives. He works primarily with small and medium-sized companies in the private sector, as well as professional services firms and not-for-profits. He is co-author, with Alex Gill, of the book, “A.I.M. – Achieve, Inspire, Make a Difference”, published by Wiley & Sons. The book maps out the personal and career success program that the authors developed over years of hard-won business and life experience.