

## **It's Amazing What You Can Do in an Hour. The Story of CWC's *Power Hour***

*By Stephanie MacKendrick*

I was reading an article the other day written by a woman who was exasperated by networking – both networking itself and the constant exhortations in articles, books and advice columns to get out there and MEET people!! She had taken the advice to heart and had been on a frantic round of cocktail parties, breakfasts sessions, lunch 'n learns. Facing social burnout, she was just about ready to crawl into a hole and never come out, reduced to roadkill under the wheels of the networking bandwagon.

But rather than a slam on networking, I thought that was more about the perils of excess - the counterproductive possibility of networking becoming a preoccupation and an end in itself. Networking, like medicine, works best at the right dosage. How you network, how often, what style or format you use are all individual choices and should be part of a healthy process. No matter how you approach it, I firmly believe that if ever there was a time for networking, it is now – for your career and for your sanity.

That's because networking is how you weave a safety net for yourself, emotionally and career-wise, by maintaining connections with people that you respect and enjoy and who you know will support you and vice versa. It's how you hear about opportunities. It's how you get feedback about your career in an informal way. It's how you practice your own leadership skills by reaching out to others and learning to become a mentor. And it's the way you build a sense of constancy in a world where so many of us move house, move jobs, move companies, move into different fields or cities or countries. Through all those changes, your network is still there.

There is no one right way to do networking, no perfect template that will fit all people in all situations. And perhaps that's where things go wrong sometimes. You get the idea that you should be networking and sign up for a bunch of things that may or may not suit your style, be a good use of your time or meet your particular needs. For example, if you've changed jobs several times in a short period of time and you're feeling a bit adrift in a sea of new faces and new surroundings, you probably don't need to sign up for large scale events that are going to put you together with a room full of strangers. In that case, networking would probably be better spent arranging to see or keep in touch with former colleagues.

Equally, someone who works in a small office and doesn't have a chance to attend industry events and doesn't meet a lot of people through their work might consider the opposite strategy; trying out networking events that will provide exposure to a large number of people in a variety of situations.

No matter how you slice, networking is an essential career and personal development strategy. That's probably why so many of CWC's networking events in chapters across the country have been so well received. An excellent example is the Toronto chapter's

***Power Hour*** networking event, which became an instant success when it was launched two years ago.

Occasionally, in the parlance of baseball, you're looking for a base hit and you get a home run. *Power Hour* started off modestly enough, as a way to help members in the Toronto Chapter of CWC get together on a regular basis in a less formal way than seminars or speaking events. Despite what the title implies, it's actually a two-hour event, providing a relaxed, informal setting for CWC members and others in the communications industry to network every two months.

The idea was to find an interesting spot that people would want to come to, offer a brief program suitable to a cocktail format and make sure it was accessible. Registration was required, but there was no event fee so the only cost was the bar tab. It started out at the fashionable Club 22 at the Windsor Arms Hotel, but has since moved to more spacious digs at the equally alluring Park Hyatt Hotel.

### **What Makes *Power Hour* a Success?**

People tell me often that they like *Power Hour* because it's a networking event where there seems to be no pressure. Newcomers feel welcome and veterans look forward to renewing acquaintances and meeting new ones. Perhaps even more important, there is a great mix of people from all sectors of the industry, different levels, looking for different things from the event. And the *Power Hour* crowd seems to be very good at finding ways to be helpful to one another, not just participating in the slam-bam, hit-and-run tactics that can ruin networking events in a flash.

Accessibility is certainly one factor; *Power Hour* is open to women and men at all levels. In addition to CWC members, who get first dibs on the limited number of places available, it's an inclusive event, widening the circle to industry non-members. Registration is easy and can now be done on-line

A welcoming atmosphere is another. CWC takes great pride in ensuring that whatever the situation may be outside, at a CWC event competitive issues take a backseat to support and fellowship. Each *Power Hour* has an informal atmosphere that encourages mingling and is enriched by a team of CWC volunteers who circulate within the room to facilitate introductions as well as provide information about the event and CWC. At *Power Hour*, no one ever wanders into networking hell – facing a solid wall of strangers with nowhere to start.

CWC's convergence positioning helps. *Power Hour* provides a social focus for a cross-section of the industry (each sector tends otherwise to have its own events), providing a unique opportunity for members of different areas of the industry to get to know one another.

And of course savvy is a part of it too - the team always has a short, snappy program that features a mini-presentation on relevant topics. Sample topics from past events include

career development, marketing yourself, change management, media relations. The speakers are accomplished and they attract an interesting –and interested - crowd. The presentations are practical and to the point.

Then there's the brilliant CWC Toronto Chapter team behind the event, *Power Hour's* team leaders Lally Rementilla, Assistant Vice President and CFO of Lucent Technologies, Michelle (Mitch) Nadon, Senior Manager, Regulatory Affairs & Policy Strategy at Bell Globemedia, and Dennie Theodore, Manager, Business Proposals, Atlantis Systems International. This dynamic trio has been the lifeblood of *Power Hour*, with their respective roles as analyst, strategist and synthesist. Together they have worked tirelessly to hone the format, to make something great even better and to ensure that *Power Hour* evolves to meet the ever-changing needs of CWC's members in the Greater Toronto Area.

The outcome is a terrific one for all involved.

For the team members – and there is a large group under the leadership of Lally, Mitch and Dennie – it's a terrific opportunity to gain experience in planning, executing and facilitating industry events.

I like to think that *Power Hour* gives networking a good name. Instead of promoting networking as simply a means of finding a job or landing a better one, *Power Hour* makes it a part of building a community that will serve the individual over the longer term in researching, understanding, connecting with and ultimately enjoying one's chosen path. It's a format that encourages listening and understanding; it is about the exchange of information and contacts, rather than merely compiling or consuming them. If you ever get a chance to go to a *Power Hour* take a good look around the room because that's where you'll meet tomorrow's leaders.