

## Cover Story

## Kathleen Ronald

There's a rumor going around that Kathleen Ronald was planning her networking strategy before she was born, so that when she hit the world, she would be ready! And when you meet Kathleen for the first time, you would have to agree that the rumor has a considerable amount of validity. "It has never been difficult for me to network," she says. "It's what I do naturally. You can put me anywhere and I will make friends. I truly love people; they fascinate me. I'll walk up and talk to them in the grocery line, in the elevator...anywhere! It's easy! In high school, some of my classmates were timid and shy, but I knew everyone, and was always trying to find ways that they could all be included."

Because Kathleen was so comfortable interacting with people, it took her a while to understand that the things she did without thinking about them were strategies that would be transferable to the rest of us who have more trouble making connections. "23 years ago, when I started with Mary Kay," Kathleen says, "we were taught that anyone within 3 feet is a potential customer, because everyone has skin! We were trained to do 'warm chatter,' finding the people closest to us and starting up a conversation. I started playing with creative ways to get the conversation going, and came up with a button that said, 'I'm So Excited! Ask Me Why!' At the next Mary Kay convention, I pinned buttons all over my blazer, and soon 8000 women were asking, 'Where's the button lady?' I created an entire series, including 'Don't Delay, Do It Today,' 'Bored With Your Job? Try Mine!' and 'No Excuses!' Each button created an opening for conversation, each offered a painless way to connect with other people. I had tapped into a deep well of need...it was all about helping people network. Each new button I created made it easier for us to be successful."

As Kathleen bloomed in her career as a world-class customer service trainer for companies like Apple Computer and Nordstrom, and as a compelling keynote speaker, she began to focus more and more on the challenges of networking. About five years ago, she finally put together a seminar of her experiences to meet the needs of business professionals who wanted to upgrade their networking skills. Now she travels extensively, sharing her expertise as the Networking Queen, and setting up safe environments for people to learn new ways of expanding their contacts. "Even though I call myself a networking expert," she explains, "I also tell my clients that you 'network' computers, but you 'connect' with people. When you network effectively, you connect at the core of a person, you connect at the heart. This requires more than just passing out cards at a monthly meeting. It requires that you are curious, interested, and passionate about knowing the other person, and what you might be able to do to help them."

Kathleen operates from a set of core principles that have served her well. First and foremost, she knows that it's what you believe about the possibilities of your success that will determine whether you succeed or fail. Like always attracts like, so if you have a limiting belief that networking is difficult

and painful and won't work for you, that's the experience you will have. If you believe that you are a great networker, and that people at the next event will benefit from your goods and services, that's the experience you will have. "Belief drives business," she says. "Every card you hand out has a belief behind it, has an intention behind it. To have a positive impact on your business, that card needs to carry with it your belief in yourself, and your conviction that you have something of value to offer."

Another principle that guides Kathleen's networking strategy is that relationship comes first, and business follows. Building a strong relationship with your prospects, showing your sincere interest in them as people, and your respect for their situation creates the kind of long-term connections that will sustain your business. That being said, Kathleen never loses sight of the prize...she networks to generate business, and maintains the strength of her intention to translate connections into contracts.

One of the characteristics that sets Kathleen apart from other networking gurus is that she works with her clients to help them develop a personally authentic strategy, rather than relying on a cookie-cutter approach. "People tell me, 'I could never be like you, Kathleen!' and I say, 'Thank God!'" she laughs. "I can be a very intense person, and some people would rather walk on fire than listen to me for a couple of hours. I believe everyone has his or her own audience. The important thing is that the complete package has to be the best YOU. If you want to establish a strong connection and a healthy business relationship, your prospects and clients need to know who you really are."

Regardless of someone's style, business orientation, or desired outcome, Kathleen maintains that there is one absolute necessity for successful networking: you have to follow up on your leads. "The biggest mistake people make," she declares, "is that they forget to develop and implement a follow-up strategy. They can have a card in their hand worth millions, but it will end up having zero value if they never make the connection. If you don't intend to follow up, don't take the card! It's that simple."

Though Kathleen's business is, well, business, her metaphor for life and work is to just have fun. "If it isn't fun," she says, "Why bother?" But she adds, "Have a good time with intention. Connect, follow up, and translate that relationship into prosperity for you and satisfaction for your clients." Spoken like a true Networking Queen!

Kathleen Ronald

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