

## Networking

If you were to read only one part of this book, we would encourage you to select this chapter. (We do, nevertheless, want you to read the whole book.) As important as strategic planning, financial organization, legal awareness, and marketing and fundraising savvy are, there is no skill that will help your career as an artist—and in anything else that you do in life—more than networking. All of the other skills are complemented and supplemented by an effective use of networking.

If you are searching for a general definition of networking and how it fits in with your larger professional development as an artist, you could say that networking is about engaging in the world. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines networking as “the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions; *specifically*: the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business.” For artists, networking is about developing a base of people who will support your efforts and want you to succeed. People who will play a larger role than just being potential patrons (which is by no means intended to diminish the importance of that role). Networking is about finding and building relationships with people you care about who are linked to new opportunities, new markets, and untapped resources of expertise and support.

Chances are that you have attended some kind of class or lecture where someone successful spoke about how they built and maintained a network. This is valuable information. So are the host of tips, tricks, and organizational tools at your disposal. Start a Rolodex (or, better yet, skip that step and go straight to a digital option). Take advantage of new forms of technology and social media to initiate and *maintain* contact with more people. Attend special networking events for people in your industry or medium. Save every business card you get, and follow up with a letter or e-mail after you meet someone, while the contact and exchange of business cards is still fresh in the minds of both of you. Follow up

to maintain contact and build a relationship. If you have no relevant connections, start with your friends and family and spread out from there—this advice and more is all over the Internet and in books.

But all of the Rolodexes in the world will not address the core challenges of networking, nor will any tools or suggested activities make this activity any less daunting if it is something that does not come naturally to you. This is because access, time, your personality, and most importantly your preconceptions, are the biggest challenges facing any artist looking to network successfully.

It is very difficult to get access to successful people when you don't know them. They have "gate-keepers"—personal assistants and secretaries standing in your way, and even if you somehow get past them there is a good chance that your would-be contact doesn't want to be bothered by a perfect stranger. Think about your own life and work as an artist—when you are in the practice room, writing a chapter, rehearsing, or in the studio, how do you react to someone you don't know knocking on your door looking to talk about themselves? Some people might be receptive, but many others would not even bother to answer, or worse, be hostile.

Time is also an issue. Most successful people tend to be busy. Even if you go through the "proper" channels and get a meeting or phone call with the person you feel can help you, chances are that he or she will only have a few minutes to speak. Knowing what to say and how to say it in a short direct way takes practice. As for your personality, you may be one of those fortunate people who simply *is* likeable, who likes people and has an easy outgoing manner. These people probably don't think about it—it just comes naturally. Maybe it's the "gift of gab," an easy smile, some patented jokes, or something indefinable—you might even be one of these people. But many artists are not. We are often a solitary lot, absorbed in our work, defiant of convention, and fiercely devoted to our independence. In short, many of the qualities that make for good artists can also make for bad networkers.

But, that does not have to be the case. Just because you are not a textbook extrovert, does not mean that you cannot develop skills to help you become an effective networker. This is where your own preconceptions come into play. We believe that every artist has the capability to be a first-rate networker with just a small change in thinking. This does not mean that you get to cut any corners—you still have to put in the same amount of work. But think about some of the challenges we associate with networking. Many stem from the idea that you need to *use* your connections in service of your career. Wrong, you need to use your connections in service of your life. If you have already categorized someone and what you hope to get from him or her, any of your interactions that do not further that goal or bring you closer to fulfilling your expectation may seem like a failure. And it may well be techni-

cally a failure, if you own  
to because you were too

The best network  
much of which is screen  
make a conscious effort  
should be. Some of the  
that here. NYFA's Execu  
collected a few truisms:  
emphasis is not on what  
they might apply to you.

## "EVERY PERSON SELLER, COLLECTOR, SOMEONE WHO HELP YOU IN SOME WAY"

The emphasis here is on  
solely because of their work  
might be a benefit to your  
friendships.

Aside from the rare  
people you feel will become  
number of valuable contacts  
from one position to another  
in-law is intimately connected  
you might perceive as a "value  
Furthermore, your needs  
may suddenly become important  
you put out a best-selling  
most creative) networkers

## "LIFE IS SHORT: I DON'T HAVE TIME TO WASTE"

How many people can handle  
does not exist. Simply put,  
perhaps someone snapped  
on another person. Most of

cally a failure, if you overlooked a genuine opportunity that this contact could have led you to because you were too busy focusing elsewhere.

The best networking is about developing genuine relationships with other people, much of which is serendipitous or coincidental, not planned. What you can plan to do is make a conscious effort to abandon bad habits or misconceptions about what networking should be. Some of the most successful networkers do so organically, and they have shared that here. NYFA's Executive Director, Michael Royce (himself an excellent networker), has collected a few truisms about networking from his own observations and experience. The emphasis is not on what you do, but how you do it. Think about each of these ideas and how they might apply to you.

**"EVERY PERSON YOU MEET IS A POTENTIAL BUYER, SELLER, COLLECTOR, FUNDER, PRODUCER, OR KNOWS SOMEONE WHO IS ONE OR MORE OF THESE, AND CAN HELP YOU IN SOME WAY."**

The emphasis here is on *every* person you meet. We advise you not to single out people solely because of their wealth, title, social status, or whatever else you have identified that might be a benefit to your career. You would not make this distinction when establishing friendships.

Aside from the rather strained interactions that will arise from pursuing only those people you feel will benefit your project or practice, you will be missing out on a huge number of valuable contacts. It is impossible to know what circumstances will lead someone from one position to another, or whether someone's college roommate, cousin, or brother-in-law is intimately connected with someone who can help you directly. Every person that you might perceive as a "valuable contact" is someone else's neighbor, son, patient, or friend. Furthermore, your needs are always changing, and your contact in the banking industry may suddenly become important to you after your contact in the publishing industry helps you put out a best-selling book. Every person can help you in some way, and the best (and most creative) networkers know this.

**"LIFE IS SHORT: BE NICE TO EVERYONE."**

How many people can honestly say that they are nice to everyone? Such a person probably does not exist. Simply put, it's hard to do. If you have a bad day, or you didn't sleep well, or perhaps someone snapped at you earlier and hurt your feelings, it is all too easy to take it out on another person. Most of us learn, often the hard way, to control this impulse so we are not

taking out our frustration or unhappiness at our boss or someone we deem "important," but alas, all too often the target becomes someone "safe" like a family member who is more likely to forgive us. We caution against this.

Remember, as noted above, every person can be an important contact, and the fact that are able to control ourselves in certain contexts because it is in our best interest to do so proves that we really can do it anywhere. It just takes extra effort, and may require taking time out to take a deep breath, collect yourself, and get back on track. We all tend to be more comfortable with and better disposed toward people who are nice to us; it's human nature. Taking that to the next step, if you make an attempt to be nice, people will be more inclined to help you. It is in your best interests.

### **"SAY WHAT YOU MEAN AND MEAN WHAT YOU SAY."**

There is no greater currency in the networking trade than honesty and reliability. Just as you are building contacts for your own project or practice, those with whom you interact are doing so for their interests as well. From the moment that people meet you, you are building a reputation. If you have a reputation for delivering on your promises, your contacts will come back to you time and time again. As artists, we have all met more people than we can care to remember who make impossible promises on very ambitious ideas . . . and then never follow through. At best, it leaves you disappointed; at worst, it leaves you having lost time and money.

If you can't do something, just say so. Your contact will appreciate your honesty. And if you agree to do something, make sure that you actually do it. You will earn your contact's confidence and he or she will not only return to you with greater opportunities but will feel comfortable recommending and introducing you to their connections (which is the very definition of networking). Failure to deliver on a promise can be costly to your reputation.

### **"ENJOY EVERY INTERACTION WITH NO EXPECTATIONS. OTHERWISE EXPECTATIONS LEAD TO RESENTMENTS."**

People who are good at networking enjoy networking. This goes beyond the human tendency to like those things that we are good at. Rather, it goes to the heart of what NYFA wants you to take away from this section—artists have an innate capacity for making connections with others, even if your real desire is to be alone in your studio working. Part of what draws you to art and makes you good at it is your ability to perceive and appreciate beauty in many forms. You may do this through different media, or be more oriented towards sounds, sights, or concepts, but this ability to appreciate details in the world or the human experience makes you unique. Use this skill to appreciate and enjoy your interactions with others as you

seek to network. You will find that you are not framing the interaction as a transaction. It happens when expectations are managed and that person has to offer, build a

### **"A GENUINE INTEREST IN OTHERS IS A GENUINE INTEREST IN YOURSELF."**

This is really a corollary to the first point. You are interested in the person with whom you are interacting, not just the flattering regardless of their past experience rewarding for you. It is a point in doing it if it feels meaningful to the interaction meaning. And it is a willingness to listen.

For almost every artist, the key to interest in those with whom you are networking is a two-way street. You do not take any time to learn about them. Would he have any interest in you? The reason we do not pay attention to them is because we are used to thinking of them as someone we should get to know. And you will eliminate this problem.

### **"FIND THE PEOPLE WHO CAN DO WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOU."**

Once you have made a new contact, you have to offer them something. You are approaching them in the first place. You may not see what you can do for them, which we can help someone else. How to do this is by taking an interest in them. It is important. If it is another artist, showing up at her opening or visit your website, or she may

seek to network. You will find that you perceive many details about the other person if you are not framing the interaction with certain expectations before you start. Resentment happens when expectations are not met, so try to avoid them. Instead, just enjoy whatever that person has to offer, build and maintain a relationship and see what happens.

### **"A GENUINE INTEREST IN OTHER PEOPLE DELIVERS A GENUINE INTEREST IN YOU."**

This is really a corollary to point about enjoying the interactions. If you are actually interested in the person with whom you are meeting, it will come across. Most people will find it flattering regardless of their position or experience, but more importantly, it will make the experience rewarding for you. Successful networking takes time and effort, and there is no point in doing it if it feels meaningless to you. By taking a genuine interest in others, you give the interaction meaning. And it should not be difficult to do—everyone has a story if you are willing to listen.

For almost every artist, taking (or even in the beginning, appearing to take) a genuine interest in those with whom he or she networks is a good strategy. It bears repeating that networking is a two-way street. Your contact is not obligated to help you, it's a choice. If you do not take any time to learn about who he is, or show any interest in reciprocating, why would he have any interest in helping you further your career? More often than not, the reason we do not pay attention to the needs and interests of those with whom we network is because we are used to thinking of the contact as someone we have to impress, rather than someone we should get to know. Treat your networking contacts as you would your friends and you will eliminate this problematic dichotomy.

### **"FIND THE PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP YOU, AND FIGURE OUT WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR THEM, NOT WHAT THEY CAN DO FOR YOU."**

Once you have made a new connection with someone, make the most out of it by showing what you have to offer them. This may appear counter to your goals and purpose for approaching them in the first place, but it is an important long-term strategy that often pays off. You may not see what you have to offer right away, but there are always little ways in which we can help someone else to achieve her goals. Of course, the only way you will know how to do this is by taking an interest in this person and learning what they consider to be important. If it is another artist, even someone who has achieved considerable success, showing up at her opening or performance can make a lasting impression. She may never visit your website, or she may lose your card, but if you help her with something she truly

needs she will remember you. Helping your contact is the best way to build and maintain a relationship. It is always better to have the gratitude debt working in your favor, that is, not being excessively beholden to others.

### **"PEOPLE WANT TO HELP. IT FEELS GOOD."**

An effective network is more than just having connections with lots of people. It is having connections with people who will actually do something to help your project or practice.

People help because they want to. They may not know anything about the quality of your work, but they will want you to succeed if your relationship with them is genuine. If your network is made up of people who fall into that category then you have a very powerful network. If you treat them well, care about them as people, find ways to help them, and generally remain open to who they are and what they have to offer, the chances are very high that they will return the favor.

### **"ALWAYS KNOW WHAT 'MAKES UP' A PERSON AND BE PREPARED TO ASK FOR HELP WITH THAT IN MIND, AND THEN PREPARE TO BE TURNED DOWN."**

This is the last step in managing an effective networking relationship. Sometimes your contacts will connect you with an opportunity without your asking them, but more often than not you have to ask for help, to remind them that you need connections that they are in a position to make. Chose your requests carefully, thinking about your long term relationship. If you have built an effective network of people who like and want to help you, it will most likely make them feel uncomfortable to have to turn you down. Neither of you will want to be in that position. Are you asking something that they can even do? Want to do? Will you be putting them into a difficult situation or perhaps inviting a conflict of interest? Just because a lawyer can answer your question does not mean that she can do so without taking on liability for giving you legal advice. And just because someone has the financial wherewithal to give money does not mean that he feels comfortable doing so. He may prefer to help in other ways. The only way to know that is to have taken the time to get to know him and how he thinks and reacts.

Nevertheless, even if you have thought about your request, determined it was reasonable, and asked for something that you assume your contact is in a position to do, you still need to be prepared for him to say no. It happens. People are busy, or they may have other concerns you didn't know about, or you may have just caught them on a bad day. If you are prepared for them to say no then it will be an easy conversation. Remember, just because they say no this time does not mean that they will say no the next time you ask. You have

most likely invested considerable time and effort in the relationship. Networking is hard work, and networkers understand that about themselves or their connections.

## **MARKETING AND NETWORKING**

The topics of marketing and networking for one artist may not be the same. A media outlet may not appeal to your art—and project that on your own. Marketing yourself, and just as much, networking, have discussed, your passion and what you've been seeking.

### **A REPERTORY OF MARKETING TOOLS**

#### **ArtSlant**

Provides an extensive collection of buzz, reviews, and commentary.  
[www.artslant.com](http://www.artslant.com)

#### **Community Arts Advocacy**

Community arts advocacy and management services to artists and arts organizations.  
[www.communityartsadvocacy.org](http://www.communityartsadvocacy.org)

#### **Flickr**

Online photo management and sharing.  
[www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)

#### **Mutual Art**

Online art information and resources.  
[www.mutualart.com](http://www.mutualart.com)

most likely invested considerable time and effort in this relationship (as we said at the outset, networking is hard work), and it would be a mistake to throw it away. The best networkers understand that being rejected is simply part of the process, and do not let it set them—or their connections—back in any way.

## MARKETING AND NETWORKING—THE TAKE-AWAY

The topics of marketing and networking, you must keep in mind, are extremely fluid. What works for one artist may not work for another. Likewise, what appeals to one consumer or media outlet may not appeal to another. You must find a way to take what you love—that is, your art—and project that on your potential audience. A great rule of thumb when networking, marketing yourself, and just for life in general is to be genuine. In other words, successful marketing and networking efforts mirror the creative process itself. Using the tools we have discussed, your passion will rub off on others and you will over time gain the success you've been seeking.

### A REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE OF MARKETING RESOURCES FOR ARTISTS

#### **ArtSlant**

Provides an extensive calendar of arts events, a listing of contemporary artists, art buzz, reviews, and commentary on a city-by-city basis to the worldwide art scene.

[www.artslant.com](http://www.artslant.com)

#### **Community Arts Advocates**

Community arts advocacy and artist support include marketing, educational and management services to arts non-profits.

[www.communityartsadvocates.org](http://www.communityartsadvocates.org)

#### **Flickr**

Online photo management and sharing application.

[www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)

#### **Mutual Art**

Online art information service providing art collectors and enthusiasts with personalized art information about artists, galleries, museums, auctions results, and more.

[www.mutualart.com](http://www.mutualart.com)