

the intentional networker™

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Attracting Powerful Relationships,
Referrals & Results In Business

CHAPTER 4

* focus on quality

IT'S NOT ABOUT HOW MANY CONNECTIONS YOU HAVE

In this chapter, you will:

- Learn how and why to shift your focus from quantity to quality.
- Analyze what and who really bring you the results you want.
- Discover how to have more time for what matters most to you.

In planning for the coming year, Ethan worked on creating a weekly scheduling template. He was particularly interested in seeing how much time he should set aside for coffee and lunch dates, networking luncheons, and other social, professional, and business development events. He glanced with satisfaction at his large database of contacts, which included a huge array of friends, colleagues, clients, possible venture partners, referral sources, advisors, vendors, professional contacts, prospects, and others – almost everyone from whom he had received a business card in the last five years. In addition, Ethan had a stack of business cards he'd accumulated from recent networking events. These were new contacts he wanted to know better, many of whom had invited him to meet and visit over coffee or lunch. Ethan felt extremely popular!

A devoted networker and a firm believer in the power of connections, Ethan enjoyed building relationships. He was a people person and most of his business came from referrals. But as he did some quick math he experienced a paradigm shift.

Ethan noted that he typically worked forty-eight weeks out of the year and devoted an average of forty to forty-five hours a week to his business activities, including time with clients, marketing activities, and administrative projects. This schedule gave him time for some writing, his family, and training for a triathlon, which was a passion for him.

As Ethan made his calculations, he discovered that if he hoped to have even one phone chat, coffee, or lunch with each contact in his database plus attend one or two networking or association events a week, he'd be spending *all* of his working hours on the phone, at coffee, at lunch, or out of the office. It was clear he'd need to double the hours in his work week if he had any chance of keeping up with his

networking schedule, handling projects from his existing list of clients and tending to other business tasks.

This was not acceptable to Ethan. He did not want to give up the time with his kids, his writing, or his athletic training. Additionally, he was not in a position to add more staff or expand his marketing budget.

The light went on for Ethan. He realized he needed to become more focused and selective concerning where he invested his energies and time. He realized that he must figure out which clients, contacts, networking efforts, professional memberships, and commitments created the most profitable and satisfying results and value for him and his business. To do that, he needed to know what characteristics these valuable contacts shared, and how to focus on and attract them and only them.

Ethan's planning suddenly addressed different issues, such as how to focus his time, energy, and resources, and how to develop a method that would help him become more discerning and disciplined. He saw that there could be a downside to having too many contacts in his database, which had actually grown too large to manage. He had reached his CCM (Connections Critical Mass). It was suddenly clear to him that more is not always better.

Like other enthusiastic networkers and extroverts, Ethan had believed everyone he met and every business function he attended had something to offer him and his business. His open-ended, open-minded approach may have been a great way to take his first steps when his business was young and his database small, but things were different now. As his business matured and his database and networking calendar grew, they were on the verge of robbing him and his business of valuable time, resources, and energy.

Ethan's phone was ringing and his email inbox was always full. Both of these situations could be perceived as signs of a healthy business. However, more and more of these calls and emails were just "connections clutter": invitations to sales events and fundraisers from people he hardly knew, requests to have lunch or coffee from contacts who wanted his time, energy, or advice (usually for free), requests from prospects who desired his services and expertise, but had K-Mart budgets or could only pay him on spec. Ethan was also being invited to serve on committees, write and contribute articles, and speak at or emcee events. Some of these were potentially excellent opportunities, but many were requests for Ethan's time and expertise, often without any compensation.

It was all becoming overwhelming. Things had to change.

Note this wasn't about Ethan becoming a snob or acting like he was better than anyone else. It simply meant it was time for him to move to another level of discipline and focus. He finally saw that as a small business owner he had a finite amount of time to work and connect.

analyze who and what is right for you and your business

Does Ethan's story sound familiar? If you're like Ethan and find yourself swamped by an unwieldy database, an overactive networking schedule, and an increased demand for your time and expertise without sufficient return or compensation, here are some steps you can take to become more focused on quality and results. The methods described here are a great way to reach greater clarity on what feeds you and your business so you can:

✧ **focus.**

✧ **invest your time, energy, and resources wisely.**

- ✧ **attract and build worthwhile relationships.**
- ✧ **move to a new level of efficiency, productivity, and results.**

Start with the 80:20 Rule.

Also known as the Pareto Principle, the 80:20 Rule states that typically 80% of most results come from 20% of the causes. For example, you probably wear 20% of the clothes in your closet 80% of the time. Or you may use 20% of the ingredients in your cupboard, pantry, or refrigerator in 80% of your meals. And you probably spend 80% of your time with 20% of your friends.

You can apply the 80:20 Rule in a multitude of ways to figure out what quality means to you and your business. Ask yourself:

Which 20% of your

- ✧ **Clients**
- ✧ **Contacts**
- ✧ **Friendships**
- ✧ **Associations/Memberships**
- ✧ **Networking events**
- ✧ **Coffees/Lunches**

Bring you 80% of your

- ✧ **Profits, most rewarding projects, and testimonials**
- ✧ **Referrals, ideas, tips, news, and valuable opportunities**
- ✧ **Clients, connections, and news on best practices**
- ✧ **Enjoyment, energy, inspiration, and support**

Put the 80:20 Rule to use in as many ways to analyze as many situations as you can think of. You will gain a profound new perspective on the value of just about every relationship you have and every activity into which you put time, energy, and resources. From there, you can learn to recognize the traits of the people and opportunities that have the highest potential to be your Top Customers and Contacts (a.k.a. Twenty Percenters or Top 20%) from the get-go. This will enable you to energize yourself and your business rather than to deplete it.

- : When you can create an efficient goldmine of a database
- : and a more focused networking schedule, that's the basis for
- : intentional networking.

It's not always about money.

I have several colleagues who are not clients of mine, nor am I a client of theirs. Money is neither mentioned nor exchanged except when we are debating whose turn it is to pick up the lunch tab. Yet we exchange priceless information and solve many business dilemmas when we put our heads together. We are each other's loyal and trusting advisors. People like this can be among your most valuable business allies and assets, so don't discount them just because you didn't make a monetary profit from your association with them.

Likewise, treasure your best, most encouraging friends. They may fit into your top 20% because you simply enjoy being around them. You sparkle in their presence. You pick up the phone when you see their number on caller ID and are always eager to see them. They inspire and energize you. They support and appreciate you and find every opportunity to let you know it. They give you honest feedback when you need a fresh perspective. There is value in this level of friendship. Through thick and thin, we all need these close relationships to keep going.

It's also important to feel the satisfaction of giving back. Giving to others can bring you value if you choose your pro bono projects, volunteer commitments, and leadership contributions wisely. For example, you may find it energizing to mentor someone who is eager to hear and act on your guidance; someone who you can watch blossom into an amazing leader. And it may be worthwhile on many levels to volunteer your time to a professional association or non-profit organization or to speak pro bono before a group. You can learn new skills and demonstrate those you already have. There can be plenty of value here.

define and document the profile of your top 20%

Now that you have an idea as to the Top 20% in your database who bring you 80% of your business or other positive results, it's time to figure out what qualities or characteristics these high-value, high-performing clients, contacts, advisors, friends, events, commitments, and appointments share. You may note some patterns here as well.

This is an important step as it helps you define and identify what "quality" means to you and your business. It also will make it easier for you to tune your "radar" to spotting certain traits in people and events down the road, thus helping you recognize potential Twenty Percenters more readily if and when you're ready to seek more of them.

Analyze the connection.

How, where, and under what circumstances did you initially connect with the person or opportunity? Did they meet you as a result of a talk you gave at a luncheon or an article you wrote for the local business journal? Did you meet on an airplane or at a workshop or

cocktail party? Did someone refer or introduce you or somehow create the circumstances of your meeting? The more you can remember and record about how you met the better.

For example, let's say Mary Jones is your best client. You met her through your colleague John Anderson. You and John used to work together at Company XYZ. You heard about your job at Company XYZ via Ann Smith who you met at a networking event given by an association you belong to. You get the idea.

Dig down into the layers of circumstances, names, places, and events that brought you your best clients, colleagues, and opportunities. Document them; they hold clues as to who and what works best to bring you the most fortunate contacts, connections, and circumstances.

Describe the characteristics of your Top 20%.

Come up with descriptive words and phrases to describe the characteristics of your most valuable clients and contacts. These words and phrases help you define what you are attracted to, what "quality" means for you, and ultimately what results in good fortune for you and your business. Add as many notes or traits as you can think of. You can devote an entire notebook or file to your list of traits and notes about your favorite people, clients, and opportunities. You will start to notice patterns that reveal what quality and value mean to you. This new awareness will make it much easier for you to recognize what fits into your world and what doesn't, which is equally valuable.

Develop your unique set of criteria.

Come up with a list of questions to ask yourself about people, situations, and events, as well as how you make decisions about them.

These can further help you document the characteristics valuable in your work and life. The more yes answers you get, the more likely you have a fit. Here are some examples:

Does this person/organization/product/service/event/resource:

- ✱ **Bring something positive and worthwhile to you or your organization in terms of revenue, referrals, support, expertise, energy, or enjoyment?**
- ✱ **Value, align with, or in some way compliment your expertise, time, and skills?**
- ✱ **Reflect well on you and your organization?**
- ✱ **Believe in and actively support “win-win” situations?**
- ✱ **Follow a code or set of values that align with yours?**
- ✱ **Participate in the ebb and flow and development of the relationship?**
- ✱ **Help you propel your business, projects, dreams, and goals forward?**

try this!

Apply “The Energy Test.” This is an elegantly simple way to measure who or what is a good fit for you. Simply note how you feel after you’ve interacted with a person or client, attended an event, participated in a program, served on a board, or spent time on a project. Was the experience energizing, depleting, or neither? Make a note about this on your calendar or schedule or list the interactions in a notebook. Use a plus (+) for the energizers, a zero (0) for the so-sos, and a minus (-) for the negatives. Strive for nothing less than all “+’s.”

Sure, no relationship is perfect and no client, project, group, event, or commitment is always going to be energizing, but you'll quickly begin to see patterns. Use this information to make decisions on whether or not to schedule or attract more of the same.

And remember that everything is subject to change. What was once energizing may no longer be so. Check in with your feelings, attitude, and energy levels. Make adjustments accordingly.

create your top contact list

When you become aware of and accustomed to evaluating who and what is best for you and your business, take a next step that further refines your Top 20%: create a list of your Top 10, 25, 50, or even 100 or 150 contacts, clients, projects, colleagues, associations, or obligations. These can further whittle down where you want to devote the majority of your time and energy.

Just like the clothing items that are the favorites in your wardrobe, these are your favorites in your database. They are your Inner Circle or even your Board of Advisors. Who would you put on this list, and why? Understand that the list will probably evolve over time. Create systems for keeping actively in touch and engaged with these.

Consider having two databases.

One database is reserved for only your most valuable clients and contacts. Another list is for everyone else. This works well for businesses that host events such as workshops or teleseminars, or sell products such as books, workbooks, CDs, DVDs, and other items. For these lists, quantity is important.

An alternative is to stick with one database, but use filters. If you want to keep only one database, be sure it has the capability to help

you categorize and filter so you can readily identify your Top 20% when you need to.

Though you will focus on your Top 20%, devoting time for meetings, calls, and personal notes, find and implement creative ways to stay in touch with the masses. Efficient ways to stay in touch with many people can be found using email and social media. Use these thoughtfully and strategically.

- : Focusing on your Top 20% is not about being elitist; it's about
- : focusing on what is right for you and what helps you stay
- : energized and feel "fed" so you can continue to be productive
- : and create the best results for you and your business.

why do this work?

As you become a seeker of quality, you and your brand become associated with quality. Why? Because your choices and associations reflect who you are, what you're all about, what's important to you, and what you want. You gain credibility for your focus, authenticity, judiciousness, and integrity. You demonstrate that you are selective, and that you have high standards. Others notice this and the ones who matter will appreciate it.

For example, I know that my friend Renée Trudeau, a life coach and author, is extremely protective of her time and resources, very selective about anyone she works with, and makes all choices deliberately. Therefore when I ask her for a recommendation or when she sends someone my way, I know she has given it a lot of thought and care. Ninety-nine percent of the time she is spot-on and I enjoy great experiences and results. I trust her and hold her opinions in high esteem. Talk about power and influence!

Being selective is an indicator that you are purposeful, serious about quality, and exercise good judgment. It helps solidify your reputation, builds trust, and brings you increased power to attract more good people – and even more good fortune. Smart successful people generally want to do business with other smart and successful people.

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As you become more intentional, you will likely discover that some people and activities are no longer a fit for you; you can no longer expend energy on them. That is part of growth and change, for them and for you.

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As a final note, always hold yourself to the same high standards you set for others. As you analyze what you want and need, don't forget to do some self-examination as well. Regularly and honestly consider whether you are living up to the high standards to which you are holding others. What are you doing to create relationships that are mutually beneficial?

What are you doing to earn your spot in the Top 20% of those you work with, admire, and receive value from?

Are you a Twenty-Percenter with your 20%? This is a key component to being in integrity with yourself and others. As you scrutinize others, expect that they will do the same with you.