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It's not what you know ... it's who you know

It was a saying I used to hear a lot when I was growing up. It was rarely, if ever, said in a positive sense. Typically, it would be used to describe someone who had achieved something, not through their own efforts or skills, but because someone had helped them to “beat the system”. It might have been a promotion at work or maybe being appointed captain of a sporting team. The implication was always there – that the achievement was not earned but instead was the result of a personal relationship with a relevant decision maker. Interestingly enough, the accusation was often made by someone who had been unsuccessful in the same field or when applying for the same role, suggesting that the selection process had been influenced by factors outside of the agreed skill and knowledge based criteria.

For the most part, it was a “put-down” for a successful person ... an example of what Australians call the Tall Poppy Syndrome.

With all that said, though, let's not ignore the saying completely. With a slight adjustment – the inclusion of a couple of extra words and a change in emphasis – the saying takes on a whole new, positive spin:

*It's not **only** what you know ... it's who you know **as well!***

Don't get me wrong. I am not for one minute suggesting that people should be given opportunities based exclusively on who they know – otherwise we could dispense with the first half of the saying completely. It doesn't matter whether the opportunity is a new career role, an opportunity within a sporting club, community organisation or other volunteer environment, people must have an adequate skill set and knowledge base to enable them to provide value in the role and to enjoy what they are doing.

This, then, leads to a number of important questions about seeking and accepting opportunities, including:

- What are the required skills and knowledge for a particular opportunity?
 - How do you determine the type of opportunity that you are best suited to?
 - How do you find out about appropriate opportunities?
 - How do companies and organisations find out about you?
 - What is the best process to bring these two parties – the organisation and you – together?
 - How much time, energy and effort do you need to invest to make sure that you are successful in achieving the role or opportunity that you are seeking?
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Ask these questions within a corporate environment and you will no doubt end up discussing the merits of networking. In fact, regardless of the context – work, study, sport, whatever – networking is a valuable and worthwhile activity and one that will help you to address many of the questions raised above.

There is a seemingly never ending list of books, web sites and magazine articles that discuss the theories of networking. Many of them introduce impressive sounding jargon and processes but very few provide practical advice and tips – that's where I hope you find this book a little different.

Recently, I have been asked for advice by a range of different people – amongst them, my teenage daughter, a colleague who is a few years into her career within a major international company, a mid-career friend who is a general manager of a small service-based company and a mate who wants to make a major change in his career with a totally new direction. In each case, they were asking the same questions of themselves:

- How do I identify what it is I want to do in the short to medium term?
- How do I get to a position where I am able to do it?

Considering the earlier questions, together with the requests for advice from these family members, friends and colleagues, I decided it was time to put pen to paper (as much as one does when one sits in front of a computer screen).

And so, here goes. I trust that you will find something in here that makes a significant difference in your life. Most of what is written here relates to networking in the context of career development but is equally relevant in any circumstances where someone wants to work with others to develop their skill set and/or their knowledge base, their involvement within an organisation or business, or simply wants to expand their circle of contacts.

This is the opening section of my book, **It IS Who You Know**, available at www.neilbutler.com.au/shop.htm. The book deals with the art of networking and provides pragmatic advice about meeting with people to improve your current circumstances.

The book can be purchased in paperback or on audio CD or can be purchased for download in e-book or mp3 audio formats.
