

## Mastering the art of personal communication in a digital age

Tips and techniques for harnessing the power of effective networking was the topic examined by a panel of leaders in career and business management, law, and the oil and gas industry. The presenters shared their insights at the Women's Global Leadership Conference in Energy and Technology held recently in Houston ([www.WGLNetwork.com](http://www.WGLNetwork.com)). Among the panelists' observations and recommendations:

Networking is "like money in the bank," according to Karyl Innis, chairman and CEO of The Innis Co. If done properly, networking can increase your career income by 10% to 50%, depending on what stage of your career you're in. However, most of us are reluctant networkers, she said. We tend to do it ad hoc or in an organic way.

"Not having a good networking strategy puts you behind the power curve," according to Ms. Innis. A good personal network has utility: It's valuable in that it creates financial as well as personal benefits.

**Personal brand.** A "personal brand" can serve you or take away from your career success. Ms. Innis defined the concept as "the place you occupy in the mind of your supervisor or customer."

Rebranding is changing the way others think you are. However, in deciding what you want to be known for, be true to yourself since "you can't just pick a personal brand out of thin air," she said. Find your "sweet spot." What drives you; what you love to do.

One practical recommendation that was emphasized was to go online and check out the biography that may be on your company's intranet. Is it outdated? Does it use the nouns, verbs and wording that you want to convey as pertaining to your personal brand?

**How to be a better networker.** Assess your strengths. Review your current situation; your stage in life. Be intentional and set goals. Seek out what networks are available to you that meet your needs. These are not just professional avenues. Consider networking through neighborhood or social work, spiritual networks, sports and online networks. But remember that quality of the network is more important than quantity of individuals in it.

Develop and create your own "village." However, cast your net broadly; don't just hang out with friends or colleagues who are very like you, advises Kathy Hogenon, president and CEO of Zone Oil & Gas LLC. With a background and training as a chemical engineer, she acknowledged that often technical people have difficulties communicating with others.

She advised that to achieve the benefits of networking, you shouldn't just "hang around with one individual you've encountered whom you're comfortable with." Take risks and move beyond your fears. And don't set your limits too tight. Your hub and comfort zone are only going to take you so far.

By increasing your level of diversity in your networks, you are increasing your visibility. This exposes your brain to new things and new possibilities. By looking outside your immediate sphere, you can achieve your career goals.

And, finally, the panelists stressed the need to give back. Networking is not a one-way street. Be generous with your time and information sharing. **HP**