



Networking and Professional Relationship Articles

Phillip Jones is a Canberra-based social entrepreneur who is a recognised expert on social and professional networks.

He is the director of *Two Degrees Group*, which provides a range of consulting services including tailored on-demand professional development workshops, discrete professional intermediary services and the design, and the development and management of professional networks for organisations.

He is often invited to deliver workshops on a range professional communication topic and strategies, as well as a being a guest speaker for a range of organisations on professional networking.

Phillip is also the founder of Canberra's most innovative professional and social networking community, *Schmooze* which he founded in 2003. Schmooze offers a comprehensive range of events and business opportunities for its members and guests each month and online including workshops, special interest groups and networking functions.

You can also visit his personal website here at www.phillipajones.com and the Schmooze website: www.schmooze.net.au



Heading South- how to stop things going wrong.

To err is human, the sage once said, and in any relationship it's possible for it to flounder on misunderstandings, assumptions, misplaced expectations and even deception.

In my experience, it's naturally for people to accept you at face value on first meeting and generally make the assumption that you're an ok person. That's a good place to start a professional relationship but as things progress so does the risk of things going awry.

This is not to sound cynical, but the good intentions can pile up and before you know it you travel along and think you are both in the same place when really you are going to in quite different directions.

Professional relationships can also be affected by a 'small town' dynamic. By that I mean there is an implicit understanding between the parties that just because we all live in the same place its ok to presume on the friendship, to take advantage of favours, and think they'll never get called on misdemeanors.

So, how to avoid all of that?

There are three key elements to mitigate the risk of things going awry:

Due Diligence

Think of this a reference check.

How well do you know the person? What's their reputation and their organisations brand value? What's their track record like?

All that glitters may not be gold, so before you commit to anything ask about, get some second and third opinions. The bigger the investment or risk, the more you want to check them out.

Expect them to do the same of you.

Remember, if you go into an alliance with them, your reputation becomes tied to theirs so you want to be sure you protect your own image.

Clarity of Purpose

Having established a rapport, done your background checks, and decided you want to work together, you better define exactly what it is you want to achieve.

This can be a revealing process, for this is when you discover the scope of their ambitions and vision – which may be divergent to yours.

You may have differing goals, you may wish to simply raise your brand profile through a sponsorship agreement, but they are after financial or in-kind support, but you need to absolutely clear what you both want from the collaboration.

Documentation

So if you've decided after asking about that this is an ok person/ organisation to work with, and you've decided on what you want to achieve together, time to put something into writing.

It doesn't need to be a legal document, unless required, but it should be something very explicit: I'll do this, you'll do that, we'll do this, and when, and how.

I like dot points, and the simpler the better. Don't have sentences open to interpretation. If it says something like 'due recognition' – what does that mean? Be as specific as possible and define it all, **before** you start!

A start and finish date for the agreement is recommended too and as far possible the tasks required of each party should be defined, so as to remove grey areas and potential friction points downstream.

Finally, whilst you can eliminate all the possibility of something going awry in your professional relationships you can mitigate some of the risk from the start with some of these steps.