

The Courage to Connect

By Tabitha Woods

Today's economy is downright intimidating. Job cuts, businesses closing their doors, decreased donations for non-profits, and an unstable market can make us nervous. This might breed fear and self-focus as we work to survive this economical downturn. But what if rather than responding to this situation with greed and self-interest, we respond with generosity? What would happen if we maintain and express a sense of compassion for our network of connections rather than focusing on our own problems from 8 to 5? Yes, our own issues need attention, but part of surviving this difficult time is to create and develop business connections that resonate. In order to do that, we all need to step outside of our individual microcosms...and *connect*.

Recently, I read Tim Sanders' [Love is a Killer App](#). Although it was published in 2002 (another turbulent time in our economy), Sanders' generosity-based approach clearly rings true in 2009.

The Love Cat Way

Sanders asserts that the way to make it in this business environment is to become a "lovecat." A "lovecat" is an individual who readily shares three things: their knowledge, their network, and their compassion.

How do you know if you have met a lovecat? Easy. Lovecats are people in your business circle that you look forward to spending time with. These cats have a passion for learning and for sharing what they learn. They introduce you to people that can help your current problem or situation, and they ask for nothing in return. A lovecat connects with you.

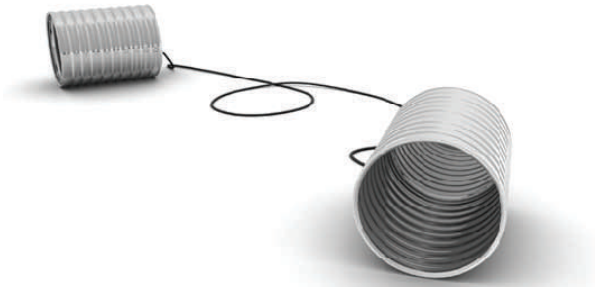
The New Differentiation

In the new economy, people have hundreds of quality choices for every product/service. Quality is no longer a point of differentiation; it is a given in order to compete.

The new way to distinguish yourself is to connect with your customers and your network at a deeper level. Bring value to them each time that you speak with them. You will have their attention when they know you are offering them more than a product/service. You will be offering understanding of their business and their highest needs. You will be more than a parasitic vendor...you will become a partner.

Here is a brief overview of the three primary characteristics of a lovecat. You can utilize these resources in order to be more effective in connecting with your customers:

It is an ancient principle: Love your neighbor (contact) as yourself. Focus on the customer rather than on the money they can send your way. Embrace the power of giving without expectation. The return on your investment will both surprise you and benefit your business.



Knowledge

Gather knowledge through voracious reading. Absorb what you read. Look for opportunities to share the knowledge you gather with your contacts. Be generous with your intellectual capital.

Network

"Your network is your net worth," says Sanders. Build your network and find an efficient way to organize it. Introduce your network to one another as you discover points in which individuals can help each other. Ask for nothing in return.

Compassion

Take a genuine interest in others, and let them know it. Many of us are uncomfortable with this aspect of our lives in the marketplace, but it will differentiate us. Be the contact in your network's life that is interested in them. It seems counter-intuitive to a generation that has been taught to generate interest in themselves or their product to succeed, but in this new economic environment, it is vital. Smallness of soul will always lose when compared to the grand nature of true compassion. Even in business.

Lovecat Exposed

As I read [Love is a Killer App](#), a memory began to run over and over in my mind's eye. I used to office with one of our top salespeople. This woman is a firecracker, and everyone likes her. She is smart, kind, energetic and positive. She is a true lovecat. In 2008, when lay-offs began to hit the Dallas area, I heard her on the telephone with one of our many former clients-turned-candidates. This man had been laid off because of a slowing economy, and he knew that it would be difficult to find a position as things slowed down even more. This was a man we exchanged knowledge with on a regular basis. Our relationship was carved from shared experience and genuine compassion. Our salesperson, without hesitation, opened up her list of contacts for this man. She made every effort to be there for him in a difficult time. It is a compliment to be one of the first resources that this man came to and the future returns have great potential. Think about it: Who will he send his next outstanding out-of-work contact to? When he is repositioned, who will be his first choice in staffing? Not only do we have a true believer walking the streets, but we have a genuine connection that views us as a resource