

Be A Renaissance Person

Contributed by Dr. A. Georges Sabongui
Wednesday, 23 May 2007

An excerpt from Dr. Sabongui's "The Art of Social Networking" eBook.

Be A Renaissance Person: The First Principle of Social Networking

The lost art of conversation

If you want to be a good social networker and meet lots of people, you have to start by being a great conversationalist. In our society today, we have lost the art of the conversation. Too many of our activities are solitary and involve little or no interaction with other people: television, surfing the web, working behind our computer screens, working out at the gym with our headphones on. We are more and more isolated from each other. In order to break out of these confines, we need to rediscover the art of the conversation. Being a Renaissance person will help you do that.

I have to say that ever since I was a teenager, I've always been a popular person. I wasn't popular in the high-school quarterback sense. I was popular in the sense that I got along with everybody. I could and would hang out with: the preppies, the jocks, the smokers (even though I didn't smoke), the cool kids, the nerds, the artsy types, the headbangers, the punk rockers, and even the shy kids who didn't have a lot of friends. Pretty much everybody. I didn't have any preconceived notions about who was worth my time getting to know, because I thought (and still think) that everybody is worth knowing. You never know if that nerdy kid that you thought you were too cool to talk to in school will end up being the bank manager you have to see for a loan, or your next boss!

I wouldn't turn off, I would turn on

The real secret to being able to interact with so many different groups of people was my ability to connect with them on their level. I was athletic and loved sports, so I could easily talk to the jocks about what

they were interested in. I was always interested in art, poetry and literature so it was easy to have a conversation with the artsy kids. I loved science and have always had a hunger for learning, so it was easy to talk to the nerds or the geeks about that. And I loved all kinds of music. In fact, I could probably talk to anyone about anything. And if I had no idea about a particular topic, I wouldn't turn off, I would turn on. I would get excited about the idea that this person I was talking to could teach me something I didn't know about and broaden my horizons.

Stepping out of our comfort zone

In this way, I can truly say that everyone I meet introduces me to a part of myself. If a friend shares a great book with me about a topic I know nothing about, or invites me to share an activity that I have never done before, they are giving me an opportunity to learn and grow. And if by reading that book or partaking in that activity, I discover that I actually like this, I have learned something about myself. I have discovered (or re-discovered) a part of me that likes this new thing. In that way, interacting with other people is one of the best ways to discover yourself. Every invitation to step out of our comfort zone is an opportunity to grow. Every opportunity to meet somebody new is an opportunity to grow.

Be a generalist, not a specialist

In today's world, we are encouraged to focus and deepen our

knowledge about one area and become hyper-specialized. To be a good conversationalist and a good social networker, you need to become a generalist: A Renaissance Person. Being a renaissance person means that you are willing to broaden your knowledge about many different fields. The renaissance person is counter current. To be a renaissance person means going broader, not deeper.

Know a little bit about everything

To know a little bit about everything does not mean to become a 'Cliff Claven' of Cheers fame! Cliff Claven was annoying because he pretended to know everything about everything. Being a renaissance person means, above all, to be gracious. Knowing a little about everything means that you have an ability to talk to people on their level in order to make them more comfortable around you. Cliff Claven used his knowledge to demean or belittle people, usually making them feel uncomfortable. The renaissance person makes people feel as if what they have to say is important by being able to discuss a topic that is interesting to that person and have something fascinating to add to that conversation. Start by reading everything. Read the classics, the Greek philosophers, about ancient cultures, about current events, about things happening at the cutting edge of science, art, spirituality and culture. Take lots of classes: cooking, art history, photography, painting, yoga, martial arts. Travel and immerse yourself in different cultures.

So your first step in being a good social networker is to develop a lifelong commitment to aesthetics and learning new things in order to broaden your horizons. This is the secret of being a great conversationalist: to be interested in many things and to be able to communicate with everyone on their level.

[Back]