

Networking is gross working

By Menno F. de la Vienne

First of all I would like to thank Kathy Chen at the China Times for this opportunity to contribute to a better understanding between Chinese and Dutch companies. In a series of columns I will try to define the similarities and differences in doing business between Chinese and Dutch organizations.

Networking is a matter of weaving a web of relations, in such a way that you are represented by the rest of the world. There is quite a threshold here for Dutch people. They regard it as ‘shameless’ to use their relations for advancing their own causes. The Dutch are known for their direct attitude, but strangely enough this does not apply to networking. It is not for nothing that the social network LinkedIn is the choice of many Dutch to network indirectly. The virtual aspect of this network takes away the objections many Dutch have when it comes to networking for business purposes.

According to Ching Ping Au, a close business relation and director of Your Op, Chinese are more inclined to use their personal relations directly to boost business or get a job. This is an approach I can relate to myself. As director of the UIA I bring companies, government institutions, realtors and other service providers together. I try to be the binding factor that is often needed by Dutchmen. And with success: despite the fact that our organization only employs two people, we have been able to help many companies in finding facilities in Utrecht. This has only been possible through a wide web of relations.

I attend many networking events, including Chinese ones. What strikes me is that many Chinese businesspeople immediately present their business card. Dutchmen start out with a conversation to see whom he or she is dealing with. When there is a chance of a useful relation, cards are presented. Chinese are more generous. This does not mean that giving a card is without meaning for a Chinese. On the contrary, it is as giving away a part of themselves. By the way: I always write a personal note on the back of a card about the person involved. At later events, I can recall our last meeting, which gives an extra personal touch.

However, our sentiments coincide when it comes to being in a hurry. We both want to move on fast. China and Holland are both countries with hard workers and traders. These are fine qualifications but can also be a pitfall. Both Chinese and Dutch often find networking too time-consuming and not rewarding enough. But they miss the point of networking which is to get into contact with valuable relations. Harvesting comes after the networking event, when you are working on the after sales.

Networking is no waste of time but an integral part of doing business. Networking is ‘gross working’. It is an effort to define opportunities of one’s organization. Do not expect that every contact or lead will generate revenue. By following up contacts, it is possible to find out if a contact is useful for your business. We must stay in touch and meet one another. Then we will find each other. We have a lot in common, that much is clear.

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