

The Value of Networks
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The human need for networks

We all have networks which we rely on every day. They may be the people related to where we work, where we live, and where we play. They may be more formal networks related to our hobbies, politics, heritage, family or faith. Think for a moment, what it would be like to no longer be connected to those networks.

A good example of a loss of networks is relocating, which is considered one of the most significant causes of stress and depression, right after the life events of death, divorce, job loss or going to prison (various sources).

Without human networks, we cannot function normally or successfully in society. There are exceptions. You could become a monk, but they are trained to rely on their inner strength and guidance from a source outside the material world. Without that intensive training, and without networks, most of us would end up more like the Ted Kaczynski, the notorious Unabomber or at least, the crazy cat lady on the local news.

Now consider how valuable networks can be, particularly in the wake of this historic election. Many credit Obama's victory with the campaign's use of the internet as a means to rally supporters and funding. The wave of grassroots support for Obama came largely from individual donors, many of which were socially connected via the internet. (One of many articles: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/7412045.stm>)

Others attribute it to Tina Fey's impersonation of Sarah Palin, but remember those SNL videos too, were largely shared via email and the internet. 130 million voted, and according to NBC, "SNL" 's election-related clips have been viewed 45 million times on NBC.com since the season premiere Sept. 13 (Advertising Age, Oct. 23, 2008).

The regional need for networks

In a report that just came out from the Maine Association of Non-profits, entitled "A Common Sense" by Warren Cook and Bo Norris, the authors describe a number of non-profit initiatives that have thrived due to collaboration.

*As in the case with many states, Maine struggles with a broad array of needs; a lack of sufficient resources to address those needs as well as the ability of funders and nonprofits to make advancements. Stakeholders realize they can **achieve more with less** by working together (http://www.nonprofitmaine.org/documents/A_Common_Sense.pdf).*

They give several examples, but one is the Environmental Funders Network, who funded an 87 page Climate Change Investment report which revealed a “surprising number of initiatives under way” which lacked the collaboration necessary to truly make any significant impact. By banding the funders together, resources could be pooled, priorities set, and hence, the Global Climate Change Collaborative – a network of funders, businesses, academia and environmental agencies - was formed.

In my experience in the marine world, my mentor has been Evan Richert, who recently was awarded the prestigious Visionary Award from the Gulf of Maine Council. Without any marine science background, Evan won this award due to his uncanny ability to gather the right people and resources together to help create partnerships that achieve change, from the Ocean Data Partnership to the Gulf of Maine program, which is the ecosystem pilot for the global Census of Marine Life (among other initiatives).

As Don Perkins, president of GMRI said of Evan: “*No single individual has had such an impact on marine science in New England since Henry Bryant Bigelow.*” Evan’s “impact” was due to his vision and belief that in this age, there is no lack of information or the tools for communication, only a need for collaboration to effect real change.

The professional need for networks

Networks, besides offering the obvious ability to connect with people in similar professions, allow fluidity, flexibility and ability to share a rich and diverse pool of resources. Consider these terms that can describe what networks have to offer over individual entities:

Fluidity – being fluid - having particles that easily move and change their relative position without a separation of the mass...(Merriam Webster)

Flexibility - a ready capability to adapt to new, different, or changing requirements

Resourcefulness - able to meet situations: capable of devising ways and means

In sum, the New England Ocean Science Education Collaborative, has simply been called a “network of networks” promoting ocean literacy in our region. Individually, we have passion, drive, and skills to create valuable tools for ocean literacy. Each voice is unique, distinct and alone. Together – in this time of overwhelming amounts of information and unpredictable events in the world economy – our individual voices can be a symphony for change to address the issues we face in our region, and in the world.