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# OC WOMEN'S BUSINESS

NOVEMBER 2005

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15

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INSPIRE  
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JULIE HILL  
CORPORATE DIRECTOR,  
PUBLIC COMPANIES



# “Here, Take My Card”

*Susan Howington makes the networking connection.*



Open your desk drawer and shuffle through that stack of business cards you collected at the last networking event you attended. Can you even remember who is who as you flip through them? Was the CPA the woman in the red suit or was she wearing gray slacks? And what was it that the gal who runs the catering business said she could do for you? When it comes to networking, quality is more important than quantity—a concept that is sometimes

hard to grasp when you consider Orange County is home to more than 700 networking groups and the practice itself has become a necessary part of doing business. Sincerity and a genuine interest in the other party go a long way to making an effective connection.

“It’s not about ramming your business card down someone’s throat,” says Susann Linn, author of “Susann Linn’s Directory of Orange County Networking Organizations.”

“Networking is about connecting and getting to know the other person,” she says, comparing what she calls “nice networking” to “turbo networking,” an experience in which most people feel they are just being hit up for business. The activity itself has evolved into a more sophisticated form of communication in which the message should always be, “Tell me about you. What are you seeking?” From that, say the experts, come real connections and often a working relationship.

That’s exactly the goal of one of the newest groups to gather, the Executive Women’s Forum, hosted by Lee Hecht Harrison’s Irvine office. About 30 women (attendance is purposely limited), all with titles of VP and above, convene in the airy banquet room at Zov’s Bistro in Tustin where they relax, dine and enjoy a nationally-renowned speaker at each meeting. “One of the reasons we developed the group,” says Susan Howington, senior VP for Lee Hecht Harrison, “is that we wanted executive women to come together and find an instant forum where they could resonate with each other. That,”

Howington believes, “is the finest form of networking.”

“I want to give people permission to relax and enjoy the event,” she says, pointing out that the group doesn’t allow vendor activity. “Part of the beauty is that women who come, trust us and know there will be no soliciting...it’s a passive way of



## smartest move

*Without a doubt, my smartest move was to enter the career services and leadership consulting business.*





extending and developing your network." Even though no blatant soliciting occurs, Howington says that contracts, job offers and other business have resulted from the formed relationships.

Howington agrees with Linn that networking shouldn't be confused with sales. "Some people," she says, "are driven by the numbers. They'll say, 'I met 20 people and gave out 50 cards so I've done my job.'" In fact, Howington says, "The biggest mistake people make is that they want to tell people who they are and what they do. If you go with the intention that you're going to get and not give, you're going to be very disappointed."

Roberta Wieland, founder of The Quiet Entrepreneur, was frustrated with the aggressive networking tactics that she often encountered. "I went to lots of different groups trying to promote my business but found that a lot of them were geared toward very brief encounters where you exchange cards and talk, literally, for two to three minutes." Wieland felt uncomfortable referring business to someone she'd only spoken to briefly, so she formed her own group and wrote a book on the subject, "50 Nifty Networking Tips for Quiet Entrepreneurs," which offers suggestions such as volunteering to work the check-in table at an event, a sure-fire way to meet people.

Experts agree on several points. Don't expect



## biggest mistake

*I lingered too long in the earlier days of my career without doing any real career management.*

*There is much that I want to achieve professionally that had I been more focused early on, I believe I would have reached a few more professional milestones at this point in my life.*

to get business right away. Networking is a long-term commitment. And, the ultimate goal is to have the other party remember who YOU are when they open that drawer filled with business cards. ♦

**Editor's note:** Howington was selected to participate in the prestigious Adecco Leadership program, which is facilitated by the International Institute of Management in Lausanne, Switzerland.

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Susan Howington leads the Executive Women's Forum.