

# Don't shy away from potential networking



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Special to QMI Agency

**D**o you talk to your seat-mate on an airplane? Or, like me, do you tend to avoid chit-chat with new people and stare at the inflight magazine instead?

I am pretty set in my ways and I've always justified my behaviour by claiming to be "too busy" to talk. I'm

not anti-social or shy, but I am introverted. Talking to people I don't already know uses up a big chunk of my energy, and sometimes leaves me feeling drained afterwards. But if I am honest about it, I know I should be working harder at making new business connections. After reading *How to be a Power Connector* by Judy Robinett on Christmas Day, I'm determined to change my ways this New Year.

What are three of the things that hold us back?

## Fear of strangers

We are all familiar with that old phrase "don't talk to strangers." According to

Robinett, statistically it's the people we know who are more likely to do us harm. And a reluctance to engage with strangers will also prevent you from finding some of your most important relationships. Every important contact you have was once a stranger — and strangers don't equal danger, they equal opportunity. It's not just about business either. While I don't normally quote 1970s college dorm posters from Rod McKuen, "a stranger's just a friend waiting to happen."

## I'm shy

For some, meeting a lot of new people and then

connecting them to others is their idea of hell. But Robinett says you don't have to be the outgoing life of the party; you just have to engage. Act "as if" you are not shy or introverted. Over time, the more you act "as if," the more comfortable you will be and you will end up not acting at all.

## Networking is manipulative

A lot of people worry that by acting social when they don't really feel that way, they will be seen as manipulative and only using others. Robinett said she wrote her book precisely because she doesn't like or believe in

traditional networking. She wants people to understand that real connecting is about building great relationships that add value to others, rather than just doing it for selfish purposes. With this approach you will receive far more because your connections will be genuine, authentic, and they will want to help you.

The fix? Make it a game. Robinett suggests talking to three strangers in a day — starting with people who are "trapped" next to you in a grocery line, at the bank, or on a plane — and identify three things you have in common with each of them.

"You'll find that most people are very gracious and

friendly. They're delighted to talk and think that you made their day. If not, well, you'll probably never see them again anyway, so no harm, no foul. And you will have started to develop a stronger 'connection muscle.'"

Well ... I just tried out this method with my taxi driver on the way to the airport in Halifax. As it turns out, he and I both love summertime, seafood and folk music. I'm not sure I've made a new business contact but I do feel richer for having had the conversation.

Not quite convinced? Try it out for yourself. I hereby proclaim 2015 as the Year of the Stranger.