

A JOYFUL WAY TO NETWORK

My favorite networking group is moving and shaking

by Jan Harding, Jantastic Meals PCS

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When it comes to marketing my Personal Chef (PC) business, I count myself among the numbers who I suspect are a majority of small business entrepreneurs. We're the ones who love what we do but aren't exactly revved up about getting out there and marketing. Sound familiar?

The tried and true #1 best marketing can be described in one word if you check out the Marketing Forum – *networking*. I'd have a tidy little sum if I earned a nickel every time I see it! Part of my brain clearly understands *why* it's promoted as such a valuable tool. But there's another part that's convinced I wasn't born with the rare marketing gene, and therefore I'm "networking disabled." I felt that way when I was required to network in my corporate career and I felt that way even more when I launched Jantastic Meals in late 2004.

Then, totally by chance, I discovered The Joy of Connecting® (JOC), which has been the key factor in gaining about half of my clients so far. When I attended my first JOC gathering, it was just beginning to grow from an informal gathering of women business owners and professionals in the home of its CEO/Founder, Bonnie Ross-Parker, to a multi-location group spread across the large metro-Atlanta area. One thing that sets it apart from more familiar groups like BNI and Power Core is that it's for women only. (sorry, gents, it's based on the observation that women form relationships in different ways than men do – not *better*, just *different*). Because it's been part of my success, I'd like to tell you more about JOC. It's now expanding nationwide, with locations launching from coast to coast. If you're near a community which has an established Joy of Connecting®, by all means go check it out. If there's not one near you now, maybe you launch one for your area!

What makes The Joy of Connecting® unique?

- *Women only* – I agree with JOC's founder that women behave differently when they're in a mixed gender group than when they're in an all-female setting. We feel and act more relaxed, allowing us to do our business in an intuitive way that fosters connections more quickly. I find it more comfortable to get my message across and hone in on possible opportunities when I'm relaxed. I often feel stressed at Chamber of Commerce events or as a visitor to some other networking organizations. Women, however, at a Joy of Connecting gathering are often more interested about food and meal issues than men. Because they are generally the decision makers about food spending, attendees are very receptive to our PC message.
- *No attendance rules* – Women can attend any meeting they choose as long as their payment for that meeting is received by the licensee/hostess before the roster is full. Attendance is usually capped at around 25-30 women. You can attend as often or as infrequently as you choose in the locations of your choice. The JOC motto: "Attend where and when it's convenient." There's no risk of losing a membership or need to find a replacement if you have to back out at the last minute. The Joy of Connecting® is flexible.
- *Pay as you go* – Each gathering costs around \$25, with payment due before the event to secure a place. You don't want to hesitate once you decide to participate because it's been my experience spaces fill up in a hurry! The cost includes dinner and extensive networking.
- *Plenty of time to showcase your business* - Most other groups I've experienced limit your routine "commercial" to about 1 minute, allowing only a select few to do a longer version each meeting. At The Joy of Connecting® you get at least a full 3-minute spotlight as well as plenty of time for informal networking. If the group is large, time is divided so you rotate and give your spiel at least twice in an evening.

- *Curious About Becoming A Licensee?* Go to: www.TheJOYofConnecting.com for details. If you decide to fill out an on line application, please list “yours truly” – Jan Harding that is - as the person who shared this information.

Wonder what a monthly Joy of Connecting® get together is like? The evening begins at 7 o'clock on a weeknight with a period of informal networking and a light meal at the home of a licensed hostess (more about that later). At the beginning of the official evening the hostess greets everyone, explains the format for the formal presentations and other planned activities, and distributes a roster listing all attendees with their contact information. The group is divided into sub-groups of about 10 each that move to different areas. A time-keeper is assigned in each group. When Round One of “commercials” begins, the first entrepreneur has 3 minutes to say anything she wants about her business and distribute cards, brochures, etc. In turn, the next person speaks, and so on. A new round begins after another dividing process. This allows each attendee to formally showcase her business at least twice. Everyone reconvenes in a large group for any remaining news, business, announcements and testimonials. Often there are door prizes donated by attendees – another way to make a connection. While the evening ends at 9:30, it's common for many participants to stay afterward for informal networking, which is often quite lively and to further connections made earlier. I always leave feeling informed, listened to, appreciated, supported, encouraged and energized!

The Joy of Connecting® gatherings are located nationwide.

Many PCs look for additional streams of income to provide both added funds and financial stability especially during the up and down cycles a PC business experiences. If you find the idea of an all-female networking organization attractive and there isn't one in your neck of the woods, consider a Joy of Connecting® license for one of those additional streams. Many franchises cost tens of thousands of dollars. A JOC license is extremely reasonable. Each licensee keeps the full registration fee generated at each gathering. In other words, if 20 people attend at \$25 each, that's \$500, less the cost of the meal and \$75/monthly for website maintenance and on going training. With reasonable effort, you could recoup your investment in 3-4 months. While you won't get rich, you will add a few feathers to your nest and, of greater value, create a networking venue to benefit your own PC business while giving other women entrepreneurs and professionals a boost. As Martha Stewart says, “It's a good thing!”

You can find more information about The Joy of Connecting® at their website: <http://www.thejoyofconnecting.com/> If you want to find out how you can become a licensee in your community, simply fill out the easy on-line application. Be sure to mention Jan Harding as the women who referred you!

P.S – I promise you, JOC didn't ask me to be its cheerleader or to recruit licensees, and I'm none the richer for sharing my enthusiasm!