Networking for Introverts

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

networking, people, introvert, person, finding, conversation, linkedin, connect, event, networking event, talk, pen pal, online, heart palpitation, room, thought, drinks, world, zoom, bit

SPEAKERS

Jennifer Corcoran, Britney Gardner

Britney Gardner 00:03
Alright, Jennifer, welcome to the Know, Like and Trust Show.

Jennifer Corcoran 00:07
Thanks for having me, Britney. It's great to be here.

Britney Gardner 00:10
So I am really excited to talk to you for a number of reasons. Obviously, we connected through a networking group and we're going to be talking a little bit about about networking for for introverted folks. But it's so funny, because even just a few years ago, if someone had said to me that I'd be interested in talking about networking, I'd be like, "Yeah, no, that's just something I do because I have to. I don't even want to talk about it." Like it wasn't even a thing that I wanted to talk about, let alone do, and now I'm just fascinated by all the different ways that people can make things work for their own unique personalities and their own unique ways of kind of seeing the world. So with that kind of intro, I would love to kind of hear your take on how you came into networking, came into that kind of thought process and built your own way.

Jennifer Corcoran 01:09
I totally get what you're saying. I think on a professional level, I started networking just over 20 years ago, and it was something that I thought I had to do, it was good for my career. And I suppose I always kind of dreaded going networking, because I'm an introvert, even though I am chatty. But anytime I get to an event, I enjoy it while I'm there. And my husband often jokes with me that I'm the last person that has to be kicked out of the room. So I think it's quite often it's the thought of networking, and the actual word itself, the working part kind of makes a lot of people and overwhelmed. But when you reframe it as simply having conversations and chats with people, it becomes a lot more fun. But I think I first started actually networking years ago. Probably I'm giving away my age, but about 35 years, I was 11, I advertised for a pen pal in a British magazine. I'm Irish, but the British magazines were popular in Ireland, and I was inundated with letters from around the world. So we're going back to the 80s. And I had, at one stage, about 30 pen pals, including pen pals in the States, I had a pen pal and Korea, I had Ireland, England, Wales, Scotland, everywhere. And I just loved writing letters to them all. And it was

quite funny because no matter where in the world they were, and we were all around 11 and 12, all the letters were the same. So people are fundamentally the same. We were all chatting about our favorite pop stars or pop groups and what we were doing in school and yeah, the letters were pretty identical, which was really interesting. And now like 30 years later, I do the same kind of networking on LinkedIn with people around the world.

Britney Gardner 03:05
It's interesting that you said that you started with pen pals. It was just a way to get to know people.

Jennifer Corcoran 03:12
Yeah, exactly. I was just nosy as well. And I just liked the idea of having a pen pal. But then when you're 11, and I had about 30, it was quite expensive in terms of stamps. I had to kind of whittle them down and to be honest the fascination with them, I think, lasted about a year, year and a half, and it was on to something else.

Britney Gardner 03:35
So obviously that was an expensive way to do it, especially at that age without the ability to earn income off of it, of course, but we have so many options available to us online now. And I don't know about you, I don't know if this is something that just I've experienced or felt but, you know, I used to not love networking mixers, if it was a structured event, and I knew I was going there and that from this time to this time we'd be doing this and this time to this time we were doing that, I could like handle it. But if it was just a mixer, and I had to walk into a room with 20 or 50 people I would have heart palpitations. I hated it. But then we had this past year of COVID. And all in-person events ceased, and people had to figure out how to legitimately systematize networking online, and I would have thought, from my introverted perspective, that that would be better, but I actually feel like it's kind of become harder for me. How do you feel about that?

Jennifer Corcoran 04:40
Yeah, it's a weird one. And I know what you mean, because when you're networking on a platform like Zoom, you know, it can get very tiring because you are looking at the other people but you kind of glanced at yourself at the corner of your eye which is quite mentally tiring for you and you're seeing yourself. Whereas when you're networking face to face, you don't see your face, you're just focused on the other person. There's pros and cons. I like Zoom networking just because I get my time back, I don't have to bother with a commute to get somewhere (an hour there and our back), and an hour networking meeting becomes three hours, and then as an introvert, I get drained, so I need to take an hour or so off after. So now it's just literally dip in dip out. So that's the positive for me. But I think it's all about finding the right network and the right people, because there are so many different types of networks. And, like you say, some are really structured, you've got like your BNIs or they've got the agenda. And at this time, we do this, and this time we do this. So I think it's about finding the right fit and right flow for you. So I say my favorite, when it comes to networking is generally women's networks. I just feel more comfortable, and especially networks for female entrepreneurs, because we're all trying to make our way in the world with our businesses. And we're sharing tips and learning from each other. But in general, I think if I think back to face to face ones, again, it was the same, just

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finding the right fit. And my top tip to going into a room like that is always I used to always arrive early for everything. So I'm that annoying person that would show up 10 or 15 minutes early, but if you're an introvert is perfect, because you get there first, you get a chance to hang up your coat, go to the toilet, and then the the actual hosts, they will introduce you to people as you come in. And to be honest, a lot of the time when you go to an event, you actually want to talk to the host so you get that chance at the start. And they're grateful that one person has showed up, they're like, "Oh, the events going to happen," because I've been an event planner as well and you never know who's going to turn up. So they are usually grateful to see that first person, it's like, "Oh, it's happening." And then you can explain to them that I don't really know anyone would be able to introduce me to somebody. And that's what they do. They're just happy to pair you up. Or alternatively you just go to where the drinks are, whether it's tea or coffee in the day or wine at the night, hang out by the drinks, because that is the place you're going to meet somebody and I never focus on working the room because that to me is traumatic. I just focus on having nice conversation with three or four people and I'm happy. And I usually meet them over by the drinks, to be honest. It was a tip I learned from a networking lady years ago, it's the word "shine." So the S is "smile," and this applies to face to face and online. The H is the "handshake." So online it's a virtual handshake, or maybe saying hello in the chat box. The I is a bit of a trick one, really, it's eye contact. But it's the same online, look into the camera and in face to face, look into their eyes. The N is "say your name and say their name." And then the E is "be enthusiastic and have a bit of energy." Because there's nothing worse when you meet somebody networking and you can tell they hate it. They're like traumatized and it's not a pleasant experience for either. I always just focus on one person. And when it comes to Zoom networking, it's all about finding the right network, the right fit. And for me, I hang out a lot in the chat box as an introvert so I'm that person picking up all kinds of jokes and wisecracks in the chat box. I may not be the loudest on the actual Zoom screen. And then yeah, face to face is just a quality conversation, just looking for one person to start a conversation and then you end up branching off and meeting more. But I never work the room. That to me is horrendous.

Britney Gardner 08:45
When I first started networking for my business, I think that was probably why I had those heart palpitation moments is because I felt like that was the goal, like I was getting in that room to meet as many people as possible and hopefully one of them would be a great connection. But I always felt so much pressure to find that person that if I was having a conversation, that felt stilted or awkward. And as a pretty hardcore introvert when it comes to small talk at least, I am that stereotypical person. No, I don't want to talk about the weather. But if you want to talk about how you felt when your pet died a few years ago, I will be there for that conversation. You know what I mean? I just want the deep conversations, I just want to actually talk about something that matters. And then you know, you have other personality types, like they're never going to go there until they get to know you. And for me, it was like bridging that awkward gap. And once I found someone who wanted to have a great conversation, who was willing to talk about all manner of things I was thrilled. I loved being in the room at that point, and then I would be, like you were saying you are, I would be the last person to leave so long as I was involved in a really lovely conversation but the getting there was always so hard for me.

Jennifer Corcoran 10:04

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I'm the same! I've been networking for years. And like, I'm a business owner now, but I worked in corporate for years. And I used to be a PA. So I actually won the title of the most networked PA in London. And I think a lot of people just expect me to go into a room at the time and work it. I remember being with another PA, and we got to the event together, and she was like, 'You're going to go off now?" And I was like, "No, I actually have quality conversations that two or three people that I actually am going to follow up with and remember their name and remember the conversations." Whereas in general, a more extroverted way is working the room. But then how many of those people actually remember who they spoke to? And did they go deep or have a good conversation? Whereas I know pretty much everyone I've spoken to. So yeah, I think it's all about finding the right fit for your personality. And even if you are an introvert, I think introverts are better than extroverts and networking online for a start. And that's probably why I love online because you can kind of put your best foot forward in terms of written posts or written messages. You can filter yourself, and you can present yourself the best way that you want to, whereas in person, even though I'm chatty, I'm not the most super articulate person on the spot. So if I find a network that I'm relaxed in, that's fine. But if it's a new network, and you're trying to suss out, is this formal, who are these people? You know, what's it all about? That is torturous. So yeah, it's all about finding the right people. And then I think you settle in, and you're just yourself and you're just having good conversations.

Britney Gardner 11:44
Here in the in the US, yesterday was the Fourth of July (that's the time that we're recording this, for our listeners). I was at a backyard barbecue yesterday. We had a great time. I had at least met most of the people who were there prior -- there were a couple spouses, I didn't really know. So I more or less knew everyone there. And you know, you end up talking to one person, and then the conversation shifts, and you turn to the other person, it's just so natural and easy. It's always been interesting to me, that I find those kinds of situations really enjoyable. I'm good with that. But then when it comes to networking, I don't actually think there's a difference for me with this, whether it's in person or online, but when it comes to networking, until I get to that place, I always feel so, well, out of place, I guess.

Jennifer Corcoran 12:40
Yeah, honestly, I just I really think it's just trial and error with different networks, because I found lots of networks yucky and awkward and hideous, and even on Zoom, I remember I joined one last year and it was a mishap. I thought it was a women's network, but it wasn't. And it was very male-dominated. And I joined it and I thought, "Oh my God, I've joined this wrong network. How am I going to get out of here?" That was just torture, it was absolute torture. So I do think it's all about finding the right network. Because when you find the right group of people, then it's easy, just likehanging out with that barbecue with your friends. But if it's the wrong fit, like the wrong people with different values to you, just a different way of connecting, then it is always icky. So it is trial and error. For me, it's smaller networks, not huge ones. And I do prefer networking with women. I know, it's probably not very PC to say, but I just relax because the male way of networking is a bit more in your face and kind of extraction

Britney Gardner 13:41
100%.

Jennifer Corcoran 13:43
I mean, it's a bit more hardcore. So I kind of avoid them. I have been a member, I've visited BNIs, I've been a member of chambers of commerce and all, but they're very male. So over time, I've just realized and gravitated towards the female-only, which is just a more gentler way of networking that suits my style. And then it's about drilling into which group because just because we're all women doesn't mean we're all naturally going to connect to each other and get on great. So it's really is trial and error, and when you find a good network, you know it and that's how we've met -- we're both in a good network. So shout out to Advance because it is a good network, seriously.

Britney Gardner 14:24
I's been wonderful. And it's none of that forced transactional awkwardness. It's so funny that you mentioned groups like BNI that are very male dominated. My husband is in sales and he's joining some of these more formal networking situations right now for his job and he's like, "Yeah, even for me (and my husband's an extrovert, he's a people person, he loves people) some of the the ones are very clearly the realtor, financial planner, groups where it's very transactional," and even he can feel the difference. I thought that was an interesting note that he mentioned. So finding the right network, we've talked a little about that, and that that really helps. But when you're approaching networking from that introverted point of view, I loved your your SHINE analogy, but do you have any other tips and tricks to maintain your energy and like, kind of come at it from your own way?

Jennifer Corcoran 15:38
Every time I went to a face-to-face event back in the old days, pre-COVID, I always said to myself in my head, "Right, I'm going for an hour, an hour only that's it." So I kind of give myself an immediate out. And I usually say it to the host, even at the start, I'll go in early and say, "Look, I may not be able to stay that long, I'll see how it goes." So I'm kind of telling them as well. And that's why I've showed up early. And then I usually get into a conversation, discover I'm enjoying myself, especially if I've had a glass of wine. And then I'm the person that's getting kicked out. But I think giving my natural out at the very start is kind of saying, "You can go in, if you don't like it, you've got permission to go." And I'm not going to be too hard on myself. And another thing I do is obviously I'm a LinkedIn trainer. So I do try and find people on LinkedIn before events, any networking event, or conference, if I can get the delegate list, I will look people up and try and connect because that for me is a warm introduction. So any event I ever go to, whether it's face to face, or online, somebody recognizes me and goes, "Hi, Jennifer, how are you?" So as an introvert, they take away that icky factor for me. So I never go 100% cold into a room. Because it can get tricky sometimes. Back in the days of like face to face, I could go to an event, a women's network, and maybe there's 50 ladies, and I found pretty much the 50 of them the day before and I've pretty much sent them all the same message, going, "Hi, Mary, we're both going to be at the networking lunch tomorrow, I'd love to connect with you." So they all come up to me super excited. And I'm thinking, "Which one is it?" It's good, though, because I'm being approached, and they're chatting to me. So I never have to do that kind of awkward going into the room, like you were saying, and that's why I always go early as well, because then people come to you and that is far less icky. You're actually the one kind of welcoming them in and that's what I usually find when you get there early. You're saying to someone else, "Hi." I think whether you're introverted or extroverted, most people feel a bit awkward going into networking. And you just say to them, "Hi, would you like a tea or a coffee? This is what I've

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had." Or, "Would you like a wine?" And then you're kind of like a host, so then they're just delighted that you have been nice to them, because they've just come in cold. Going early and hanging out by the drinks. And then in the Zoom, I suppose, kicking things off in the chatbox the hosts are always grateful, because they just want people to engage, you know?

Britney Gardner 18:13
100%. I really love what you said, that you set yourself up as the person for them to come to. You're attracting people to you by being there early, by being there with a smile and giving them an easy, safe place to start. That's brilliant. It's so good.

Jennifer Corcoran 18:35
It's something I think I've learned to over time the hard way. Because I used to go to events and I'd probably arrive a bit late, maybe 10 minutes in and it is daunting going into that room, especially when you've got those little cliques, and you have to break into a circle of maybe four women having a great conversation or you're hovering on the outskirts and it's just hideous. So I just thought, "I'm not doing this anymore." So yeah, being early or going with a friend. When I was a PA, I used to go to lots of PA networking events, we did loads of familiarization trips to hotels and restaurants, which were nice because we always go fed and nice drinks. So I'd go with a friend and then you might split up and end up talking to different people, or you could be each other's wingwoman around the room. So I think it's just about finding ways that it's less icky. And then if you do make friends at networking events, then it became, for me, I had one particular event, it was it wasn't that it was networking, it was that I was going to meet my friends. And we were having some drinks and we'll do a little bit of networking around that. So I think finding the right network, you will become friends with people. I ended up becoming friends with three ladies and we were a little gang. So any time that particular network had an event we were like, "Oh, let's catch up!" So you know, I think it's all about finding it and it's all trial and error. Some people will prefer big groups, hundreds of people, thousands of people, others will prefer a networks of 10 people or 20. And then it's all about the dynamics -- do you want that agenda, BNI style? Or do you want more of a free flow? And what I do like, though, which just surprised me as an introvert is, when I first started networking, as a business owner, the idea of doing a pitch made me sick. But now I love doing a pitch, especially on an online event, because I just think it gives you such a great opportunity for everybody in the room to know what you do. And then naturally you'll connect and have chats after. So now when I go to a networking event online, and if I'm not given the opportunity to pitch, I'm quite disappointed. So that shocked me as an introvert. But I think that's the business owner kicking in thinking, "You know, I need people to know who I am if I'm spending this hour or two on Zoom, I don't want to just network for the sake of networking, I want to be strategic and let people know how I can help them."

Britney Gardner 20:59
No, that's perfect. And it's the best icebreaker in the world. Because once they have heard your pitch, they're like, "Oh, well Jennifer, she's the girl who does LinkedIn training." And when they do end up near you, and in that mode of starting a conversation, there's already something to talk about. So it takes that onus off of you just like you were saying, by being there early, it takes the onus off of you, when you're the smiling face in the room all ready,

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Jennifer Corcoran 21:22
And you can add in some personal touches. It doesn't have to be all about what you do. I'd usually say to people, "I'm from Dublin, but I live in Devon," and then you will get people to go in talking about something Irish, or I've been to Devon. I kind of try and pepper in a few personal things. You never know what somebody is going to resonate with.

Britney Gardner 21:43
100%. It's so funny. I mean what you're talking about with networking, is actually very similar to how I teach content strategy. And I'm only just making this connection now. So this might not be fully thought out as I say it, but content strategy, you do the same thing, right? You decide, "Okay, I'm going to talk about this, I'm going to make sure it gives people a way to connect it to their life." Whatever story you're telling, whatever task you're teaching, you want to be able to allow them to connect it to their life so that when they decide, "Oh, yeah, I really do need help with content strategy," you're the connection that they are already there with. And you're saying the same thing with networking, right? Like, "I'm from Dublin, but I live in Devon." You're giving them that connection point so that when they decide to come speak with you, they already have a way to bridge that connection.

Jennifer Corcoran 22:39
Yeah, definitely. And having had chats with a few ladies from the Advance Network that we both belong to, I've noticed that I think Americans are better at doing this than Brits or Irish, because I spoke to one lady the other day, and I was just kind of like, "Oh, I do this. I do that." And then she came on and did her little intro. And she put in so many personal details. But it was so nice, because it just made me connect to her more as a human being and I thought, I need to put in more. Like she told me about her kids, her grandkids, her great-grandkids. And there were so many things I could pick up with her on. So I do think Americans are better at that. So hang on to that.

Britney Gardner 23:23
Hey, whatever advantage I can take, I'm cool with that. Alrght, Jennifer, this has been great. I know that you are big on LinkedIn. Why don't you tell us a little bit about that and then we'll kind of close out here?

Jennifer Corcoran 23:36
Yeah, if anybody wants to connect to me, my name is Jennifer Corcoran, you'll find me on there. And my company's called My Super Connector. And if you're a female entrepreneur, I also run a group on LinkedIn called Networking Tipsat My Super Connector. And it's all about LinkedIn, but I can't put LinkedIn in the name of the group because they're a bit precious about it. If you want to know how to network on LinkedIn, join the group. It's a safe space. Everybody is in that group just to learn, how to figure out LinkedIn, how to use it. Reach out to me on LinkedIn. Always love to connect with anyone around the world. Just want to connect with interesting people like Britney, so it's all good.

Britney Gardner 24:24
Wonderful. Well, Jennifer, thank you so much.

Jennifer Corcoran 24:26

Thank you for having me. It's been great.