

## **Networking Makes One Feel Dirty**

By Timo Stukenberg

Networking events further one's career, but their participants often come away feeling soiled by them.

If we are to make our careers we have to network, it is said. But scheduled meetings for this purpose are often so dreadful that the participants even feel physically dirty afterward—unless they have a feeling of power.

Contrived conversations, appetizers instead of dinner, and loud, strange, career-enhancing people – most employees envisage a casual evening, but come away feeling soiled by it. These are the research findings from the University of Toronto in Canada and Northwestern University in the United States. Their studies are published in the professional journal "Administrative Science Quarterly."

In four studies, the scholars studied how people remembered their networking events and the feelings they had in connection with them. Those who met with people at planned networking events to increase their chances of finding a job, afterward felt "dirty, inauthentic, and uncomfortable," explains Maryam Kouchaki of Northwestern University. The feeling of discomfort was so strong that it resulted in physical symptoms.

One of the studies, involving 306 subjects, showed that after the event participants felt the need to shower or wash their hands. The authors of the study had participants complete words that had missing letters. They could make words starting with 'w' and ending in 'h', either 'wish' or 'wash'. After the participants recalled a network situation they were forced to attend, they more often chose the second option.

Why do we feel uncomfortable when we are surrounded by changing career opportunities? "That depends on one's attitude toward the event," Kachouki says. Those who focus too much on personal gain from interpersonal relationships quickly feel immoral, guilty, and tainted. This can even result in a need to wash oneself, Kouchaki says.

### **Only the Weak Feel Badly**

Those who feel badly when networking are likely to ignore the next invitation to such a meet-up and thereby impair their chances of career advancement, write the authors of the study. For those who want to advance often need a well-maintained network.

Yet not all participants have a bad feeling after a network event, the author found. People with more power had a more positive attitude toward networking events. A feeling of power can feed on being in a higher position in the company, as the authors found in a survey of a law firm. The higher their level in the firm, the fewer problems the lawyers had with the networking.

The powerful networkers approach events with a different attitude. "Moral behavior is a matter of being of service to others," Kachouki says. "Powerful people think they should have more resources to allocate."

A participant can make good use of this attitude, Kouchaki explains. To get through a career event without feeling uncomfortable afterward, participants should ask themselves an important question: "What can I offer the person I'm talking to?" This gets around the problem of feeling selfish and thus immoral.