

Hi,

Sharon Kurtz is writing today with a reminder of something that is so important to me and to the Travel Writer's Café: networking.

I've often said that one of the greatest strengths of our little tribe is the support and network of encouragement opportunity we all take from it.

Sharon has some helpful insights and tips on how we can continue to expand and strengthen our networks during these difficult times.

Warmest,
Noreen Kompanik
Pioneer, Travel Writer's Cafe

Harnessing Your Network During Tough Times: Making Connections That Lead to Travel Writing Success

By Sharon Kurtz

"You can't stay in your corner of the forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes." — Winnie the Pooh

Networking brings to mind working a room, making introductions, shaking hands, and exchanging business cards.

But that's all pre-coronavirus, right?

In the days before social distancing, in-person networking was a powerful way to meet people and make connections. It could lead to getting an assignment for a story from an editor you chatted with at an industry event. Or, a coveted press trip from the PR rep you met at a travel trade show. Even if you you're not a social butterfly, in-person networking has its advantages.



Networking is a critical part of any career. But during times of crisis—like the one we're in now—it takes on even more importance. Freelance writers during coronavirus find themselves navigating uncertainty and upheaval just like everyone else. It's more important than ever to stay in touch with your current network for survival's sake, reconnecting with old colleagues, and forging new relationships.

Networking is even more important today

Now that coronavirus has changed life as we know it, how do we network if we can't visit with each other in person?

We can still network. But's in a different way. And much of it is through a communications program called Zoom.

Networking is still an essential part of travel writing. And just because COVID-19 has upended our travel world right now, we can still effectively network online. Though we can't gather and travel to writer workshops or face-to-face events right now, networking via social media is a powerful tool in our writer's toolbox. One we need to be using to our advantage.

Networking is about building relationships

Connecting with writers, editors, and tourism boards can significantly benefit travel writers. It's a way to meet new friends and make connections that could change your whole writing career. There's no better time to build those social media relationships than now. By connecting and following others and vice versa, we build our network and increase our visibility. When we travel again, this will be crucial.

Benefits of networking with other writers

Building relationships with other freelance writers is invaluable at any stage of your writing career. However, it's especially important when you're just getting started. Having connections with other writers can provide great opportunities, like guest blogging invitations. It also allows us to share insider tricks of the trade and even new publications hiring freelance writers.

It's been my experience in the Travel Writer's Café that peers and colleagues generously pass on leads that benefit all. From sharing writing tips, and helpful new apps, or free-online photography skills classes—help abounds. And those that reach out and share, benefit the most.

It's validating to interact with those who understand your journey. Other writers who know first-hand how it feels to get a rejection—or two...or 20. They know what it's like to rewrite a story over and over—only to put it away and start over again the next day with fresh eyes.

Then, when you connect with professionals of a higher skill or experience level than you, you open yourself up to a myriad of new learning opportunities. Some professionals are open to forming mentoring relationships, which can be extremely rewarding, both professionally and personally.

Pay it forward

Think of ways you can give back to your fellow writers, too, whether it's a fresh point of view or relevant how-to articles. Sometimes we might be able to make introductions or serve as a trusted sounding board. People want to help. Human nature compels us to surround ourselves with a tribe, so allow yourself to be an integral part of it.

When you connect with and help your fellow writers, the focus moves from you to them. Share your successes and your failures. Support your peers, and celebrate

with them when they land a great story, book deal, or guest column. Remember, we're all in this together.

Networking is making a connection

Be authentic and genuine in the way you engage with editors. I've developed a friendly relationship with one editor and we often text back and forth with pertinent bits we find in our newsfeed, and snippets of current culture we find interesting. These impromptu connections often become informal pitches for a new story.

I've found that when editors ask you to write a story, it's not only because you deliver the goods, but also because they value the relationship.

They know you and like you. They trust you and your work.

This same philosophy applies to your connections with PR reps. How you engage with them will determine how much they're willing to help you with your travel requests. And they have their own network as well. You want them to say that you're awesome to work with!

Finding new opportunities

Though no editor will likely offer your dream assignment on a Facebook post before you send a pitch, networking connections provide a wider array of opportunities. The more active you are in professional writer organizations and connect with other professionals in the industry, the more exposure you get to other exciting opportunities. Believe me, they're out there.

Get up to speed on social networking platforms

Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter experts say that people who are not "connected" will be left in the dust before you know it.

We use social media for every part of our lives—in our personal relationships, entertainment, and work. Social media is not just changing the way we communicate—it's changing the way we do business, and doing so at breakneck speed. Social media provides an opportunity to jump into the conversation, post questions, get the information you need, and begin a dialog.

One of the nicest things you can do for another writer is to like and comment on their posts. There are so many media platforms and forums out there, find the ones that best work for you.

Helpful Tip: When I'm writing a story—I always follow the publication, and the local tourism board on all the social media platforms, then I like, comment, and tag them on posts.

Professional writing organizations

Right out of the blocks after attending the Ultimate Travel Writer's Workshop, I started to search for writing organizations that I could join. I wanted to enhance

what I'd learned at the workshop, and meet other writers traveling the same road as me, with similar goals.

Some organizations, like TravMedia and The International Food and Travel Writers Association (IFWTWA), have qualification processes for writers. Others, like International Travel Writers & Photographers Alliance (ITWPA) and Travel Massive, are easy to join. These organizations provide ways to network with other members and offer new ways to grow as a writer.

It's not WHAT you know, but WHO you know

How many times have we heard this quote? Bottom line is that if you want a successful career, you need to have a great source of relevant connections in your network that you can call on when needed.

Having a well-established network has become an essential part of our lives. After all, who would you ask if you needed an electrician, a plumber, a painter, or landscaper? You would likely ask a family member, friend, neighbor or colleague for advice. These are all ways of networking. And it works much the same in the travel writing community.

Schmooze or lose

When my husband asked what I was working on so diligently this weekend, and I shared that it was an article about networking, he turned to me and said, "You know what my company's motto is, Sharon? 'Schmooze or Lose.'" I thought to myself—that's not exactly how I would word it...but I suppose it's very true.

The *Merriam Webster* dictionary's definition of "schmooze" is "to converse informally: CHAT—to chat in a friendly and persuasive manner, significantly to gain favor, or to smooth the path. It's a word borrowed from Yiddish that means: Talk intimately and cozily."

I found quite a lot on the internet about schmoozing, including a LinkedIn story published in 2013, ["Schmooze or Lose: How the Lost Art of Negotiation Led to a Shutdown."](#)

What Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric said in the article—and I am paraphrasing here—is this:

"You have to schmooze early and often... Showing who you are, what you care about, exposing your hopes and dreams and values. Asking people the same about themselves..."

That's what networking is really all about in a nutshell.

Some tips for successful networking

Some words of wisdom that I have learned by networking with others include:

- Give before you ask for anything.
- Be open to the possibility of connecting—plant a lot of seeds.

- Listen well. Asking questions is key. Ask how you can be of service.
- Say thank you—"Thank you for letting me pick your brain. It means a lot that you are willing to take the time to talk to me."
- Don't ever expect that success happens overnight. Sometimes it takes a long time, and often comes in a way you never expected.

Networking might seem a daunting task for some, but anyone can quickly become proficient and quite successful with the right strategies.

Winnie the Pooh had it right. We can't stay in the corner of our forest waiting for others to come and find us. The sooner you start harnessing your network the more amazing the connections you'll find.