

BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

21 Days to Success Through Networking: The Life and Times of Gnik Rowten. By Sukenick R, Williams K. Medford, New Jersey: Information Today, Inc., 2013.

Networking is a soft skill that is seldom formally taught. Whether you are a new graduate, re-entering the workforce after time away, or changing careers or companies completely, career success often comes down to, for better or worse, the relationships you build in your network. Those who consult career advice resources are faced with many options in this often bloated business genre. Ron Sukenick and Ken Williams have put a new spin on networking with their book, "21 Days to Success Through Networking: The Life and Times of Gnik Rowten". The book attempts to link networking with the idea that habits can be formed by completing a task for 21 days in a row.

Immediately, we meet the unfortunately named Gnik Rowten ("networking" spelled backwards), a young man who leaves his job and moves to the city to start his own marketing consultation business. Each chapter is a day in his new life, with each of the 21 chapters demonstrating he has formed a new habit of approaching networking in a successful way.

The authors are well versed in the networking literature and practice, and their advice is both timeless and on trend by providing a global perspective on networking. Sukenick is the president and founder of the Relationship Strategies Institute where he is a business coach and speaker. He is the author of three additional books: *Thinking Points for Connecting Forward*, *Networking Your Way to Success*, and *The Power is in the Connection*. Ken Williams is a designated Distinguished Toastmaster, the owner and operator of a marketing agency in Indianapolis, and a first-time author with this book.

Readers will find it helpful that the authors reinforce key concepts by denoting take-away tips in bolded grey type, and at the end of each chapter a cartoon picture of Gnik is positioned beside a textbox called "Gnik's Aha!" providing invaluable reminders, suggestions, and ways of thinking about relationship building. Library staff will appreciate that Gnik uses the public library to borrow books by his favourite self-help and motivational authors to assist him with his journey.

Unfortunately, what this book achieves in helpful advice falls short with its unrealistic narrative. It is hard to envision Gnik as a real person, because he is presented as a caricature of the average person in uncomfortable and new situations. The book begins with Gnik walking to a coffee shop in his new neighbourhood where he does not know anyone. Immediately he pulls up a chair to chat with a woman who is preoccupied with manipulating some spreadsheets on her laptop. Introverts will undoubtedly balk at such a bold idea, and extroverts will be confused as to the random introduction without an obvious commonality bringing them together. This book proceeds with

suspiciously convenient circumstances and tidy resolutions. Gnik proceeds through the 21 days by consulting his mentor, meeting new contacts, and hosting a networking event for all the people who have helped him and those who he has assisted. It is clear that the authors are attempting to convey relationship-building strategies in a friendly, approachable, and entertaining way. As a reader, I appreciate the unpretentious nature of the prose and am confident that this would appeal to a wide audience. However, because of the combination of the overly simplistic nature of the plot and the main character being a young man, this would be ideal as a high school or university career services resource, and it may be less appealing for those looking for a serious career read or those who have a difficult time identifying with the plot and the protagonist's circumstances.

Chapters 1–3 discuss the nature of giving, reciprocity, and perspective. It is crucial to consider these concepts if you are involved in a mentoring relationship or recruitment competitions. For mentors and experienced staff, it reinforces the idea of humility, knowledge sharing, and paying it forward by aiding those who could use your help or expertise. Mentees and less experienced staff will learn the importance of planning ahead, time management, and appreciating learning opportunities. Chapters 4, 5, 7, 12, 19, and 20 highlight the importance of listening, asking the right questions, and giving attention to those around you. In essence, people want to work with those who are genuine, generous, and likeable. We have all experienced that salesperson or service employee who is pushy and insincere because they need your business. Sukenick and Williams stress that readers ensure interactions with connections are genuine, consistent, continuous, and not just at the point of need.

Chapter 6 provides strategies on leveraging social media networks and provides a handy chart so that the reader can thoughtfully consider how to differentiate between and effectively use LinkedIn, Facebook, personal websites/blogs, and Twitter. For individuals who are beginning or reassessing their social media presence, this chapter is definitely worth a read. Chapter 8 touts the importance of attending self-help seminars and motivational speaking events. Considering the authors' backgrounds, it reads like self-promotion and is, at times, unconvincing. However, for those who have not considered the potential power of these resources, it may be an enlightening chapter.

Chapters 9, 10, and 14 discuss the importance of standing out in the crowd and exploring all the resources and people in one's expanded network. Being creative and seeing beyond one's circle of colleagues and organization is important for professional visibility and collaboration. Rejection and how to handle it is tackled in Chapter 11. This concept comes full circle nicely, as the message in the beginning of the book encourages readers to avoid rejecting others so quickly. Librarians are well versed in the

concept of the elevator talk, and Chapter 13 is devoted to the “47 second pitch” where you impart what you can do and then ask how this can help the person you are speaking to. This is a great refresher or introduction to polishing your pitch. The importance of planning your day and then following up with your connections is described in Chapters 15 and 17, and although these chapters might discuss obvious concepts, they reinforce the importance of doing the extra steps to establish true professional relationships. Those who attend conferences will nod their head in recognition of forgotten business cards collected over the course of an event.

The authors conclude the book in Chapter 21 with their HUM philosophy: “Hear and Understand the people I connect with, and then Mention their names to others who can benefit”. The book would have finished strongly on that note, but then the epilogue follows Gnik back to his friends where they marvel at how different he is after only three weeks in the city. It is a silly way to finish, but it is consistent with the style of how the book began.

A major flaw in the book is the loose connection between the concept of habit building and the networking concepts. One of the first researchers to report on self-help was American cosmetic surgeon Maxwell Maltz, who focused on habit building as a way to better one’s self-image [1]. Forbes magazine recently reported that the work of Dr. Maltz has been routinely misinterpreted to suggest that habits can be formed in 21 days [2]. Using each chapter of “*21 Days to Success Through Networking: The Life and Times of Gnik Rowten*” to represent a day seems to be a vehicle for the authors to enforce the otherwise unexplored notion of habit building in 21 days. With the exception of the 21-day theme mentioned in the second

paragraph of the Acknowledgements section, there is almost no reinforcement of the 21-day time period and very little explained to the reader about the importance of habit building. This suggests that the use of “21 days” is a title gimmick to draw attention to the book and boost sales akin to the wildly popular 20-minute exercise videos.

Despite my disappointment in the awkward plot, I was pleasantly surprised by the amount of less-than-obvious relationship building advice that Sukenick and Williams impart. This would be a recommended addition to a public library or consumer health collection, but I would advise against adding it to a health sciences library. If you enjoy lighter advice books, the length makes this a quick read and “Gnik’s Aha!” takeaways will be worth it. For those who are avid readers of the business and career self-help genre, however, it may lack the sophistication to hold your attention.

References

1. Maltz M. *Psycho-Cybernetics*. New York: Prentice Hall, 1969.
2. Selk J. Habit formation: The 21-Day Myth. Forbes [Internet]. 2014 April 15 [cited 2014 April 16]. Available from: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jasonselk/2013/04/15/habit-formation-the-21-day-myth/>.

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