

Get Out of Your Office – Now!

How to grow a bigger brain in 10 easy steps, Part 3

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This week, I spent more time at trade shows than I did in my office. And I consider it one of the most productive weeks in a long time. Why? Because as soon as I entered the convention center, I was exposed to new people, new ideas, and new products all great sources of innovation.

One must just learn to open her eyes and see beyond the rows of booths, the promotional mouse pads and pens, and golf simulators (although some people enjoy all that) to get the full value of industry gatherings and the special element that face-to-face connection brings to commerce.

The highlights of the week included:

- A fantastic keynote address at the [TriState Camp Conference](#) on the psychology of happiness by Shawn Achor of Aspirant. And, if that wasn't enough happiness for the week, I also got to play in the largest game of Simon Sez ever, led by [Steve Max](#). While I'm not normally the kind of gal who waves her arms around in public, the camp fever in the room was contagious...that's part of the magic of the trade show.
- An industry fundraiser (SCOPE) at the same event raised money to send more than 100 kids to camp this summer. Henry Winkler was the keynote, so I even got to hear what The Fonz has been up to lately.
- A "business road trip" to Pier 92 over the weekend, to attend [Go Green Expo](#) with my colleague Kris Ruby of [Ruby Media Group](#). We not only got to explore and sample a variety of sustainable products, we also talked about the state of social media and engaged in our favorite past-times - meeting new and interesting people, posting photos of events, and brainstorming new business ideas (and, of course, getting free samples of new products).

In short, time spent at trade shows and events creates a variety of opportunities for learning, meeting, and celebrating. How do you optimize your time spent out of the office?

- Select your events wisely. In addition to attending those related to your specific industry, look for those opportunities that help you learn about related businesses.
- Set simple goals for attending (e.g., looking for new product ideas, learning something new), but also leave yourself open to the unexpected. I've discovered business opportunities simply by sitting next to the right person at a lunch session. And, if you are a subject matter expert, look for chances to speak or lead workshops yourself!
- Create a system for collecting business cards of the people you meet (for example, the backs of many badge holders make great storage space. Separate "A" contacts from others, so followup will be easy when you get back to the office. And, don't be shy. Talk to strangers wherever you go. Consider attending with someone from your team - or a colleague. Discussing what you see and how it applies to your industry can enhance the learning experience.
- Share the learning and keep the experience alive! Post your activities (and photos) on LinkedIn or Facebook or tweet the event. Many events now are setting up hashtags, so you can converse with other likeminded "peeps" while you are there. And, when you return to the office, be sure to followup with the business prospects you've met.

Tomorrow, I return to my desk. I will not be wearing a name tag. I will not be getting any free samples. But the spirit of learning, community lives on. Simon sez, "Get out of your office every now and then!" (You'll be smarter for it!)

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