

Shmooz'R: MINGLING | NETWORKING SHMOOZING | CONNECTING

■ The Reunion Premise

Let's start off by seeing if we can agree on the *raison d'être* of college reunions. I call it *The Reunion Premise*. The Reunion Premise states that schmoozing [*Definition: Derived from Yiddish, Shmooze or Schmooze meaning friendly and warm chit-chat*], mingling, socializing and reconnecting are the 4 most important activities at any reunion. Each is built around the conceit that people love nothing more than to talk about themselves, and they love to do so at length. Yet, most people are neither comfortable doing it nor very good at it. That's a problem. It's a problem because how well methods of "connecting" are achieved can determine the comfort levels of future financial donors.

If you agree with **The Reunion Premise**, you'll be surprised to learn of a new methodology that allows your attendees to get the most enjoyment out of each of the above reunion activities. The Reunion Premise also assumes that it's not the quantity of contacts that counts; it's the quality of these contacts and the relationships that follow.

■ Repurposing Name Tags From Naming to Networking

New technology and advances in social science have opened the door to re-purposing possibilities for name tags. For example, they can now be used effectively not only for identifying a wearer, but thanks to new imaging techniques to reveal unique and personal attributes. That fact alone means that bio-name tags can open a whole new world of people interrelating with one another in the most personal and meaningful ways. To put it another way: Images are the most powerful, evocative and longest-lasting medium for people to exchange personal information that will form into meaningful relationships. **Remember this: *personal information - like where you went to college, where you're from, the skills you've picked up, how you like to spend your time - are the little greeting cards that can quickly bloom into full-blown personal relationships.*** It's true for Alumni Offices and guests to start being proactive about their purpose in coming to reunions.

In most everyday circumstances this type of connecting, or as we call it "schmoozing" means nothing; but in almost pure networking events like reunions, it means everything. It means that colleges can now enable two hallmarks: individualism to flourish, and personal relationships to thrive. **Here's the point: It's smart for alumni offices to leverage two certainties: 1) Your alumni have made significant accomplishments in their work and personal lives, and 2) They're willing to tell as many people as they possibly can exactly what these accomplishments were.**

■ The Problem With Conventional Name Tags

It's funny...or weird...or both, but the one party favor you find at every networking event or reunion, the ubiquitous

“HELLO, MY NAME IS *Joe Blow*” name tag

is unquestionably the least useful and most amateurish embellishment you'll receive. It's totally worthless as a way of introducing the wearer, but we can't quite give it up because there's been no better replacement on the horizon. Even if it shows your college school photo (Old news! Think about it: Does anyone care what you looked like back then besides yourself?), it still doesn't accomplish anything with respect to triggering introductions, establishing talking points, helping to “catch up,” stimulating interactions or strengthening relationships. Other than pointing out who you may be (i.e. your identity and the name you're presently going by), it's pointless.

Actually, using conventional name tags **hurts** your cause. Here's how: There are 3 reasons why conventional name tags (the only kind now available....even from your graphic design department) are neither enhancing the social experience for many at reunions nor winning good service medals for Alumni Office staff:

1. **Cheap paper** name tags, gussied-up in vinyl badge holders, make reunion organizers look behind-the-times and out-of-step about adopting new ideas;
2. **Uninformative** name tags don't say anything “good, better, best” about the wearer;
3. **In this day and age, not customizing materials that can be easily customized signals to everyone paying attention that an organization is either operating on the cheap or not keeping up with the times;**

■ Cutting to the *Conversational Chase*

This story board of a wearer's life is a game-changer because it's the first time a name tag has offered added and measurable VALUE [we claim 3.5 times better, and we can prove it.] to any networking event. According to technology wiz Rick Borovoy, inventor of nTAG, the world's first electronic name tag, networking tools like Shmooz'R “release social capital.”ⁱ This concept of social isolation [defined as an unusual American condition where citizens no longer participate in communal activities like voting, religious services, and fraternal organizations] gained currency in Robert Putnam's break-out best seller, *Bowling Alone*.ⁱⁱ Putnam provides shocking evidence that we're not nearly as good as we used to be in forming and maintaining social networks. That's why Shmooz'R is a breakthrough: A symbolic invitation to engage in “meet and greet” social niceties. In a word, it's got the CLOUT that most people need to get social conversation started and moving along. But what else would you expect from a new paradigm of reunion mingling?

We cop to Shmooz'R being definitely old-school, but old-school works better than any thing else in high-contact social situations. Shmooz'Rs have been designed specifically for use at college reunions, a high-contact social situation. Why? Because a Shmooz'R imparts instantly-usable information, in a friendly, “let's establish a

relationship” manner to everyone within eyeshot. In everyday parlance it’s a live-event, mingling tool designed (without creeping anyone out) to stimulate conversations containing the kind of emotional hooks that lead to lasting relationships.

■ Common-Ground Images Initiate Best Conversations

Shmoooz’R both elicits and solicits conversation. It’s simply then a matter of finding common ground (i.e. exposing attendees to topics of mutual interest) and getting out of the way. Shmoooz’R does that through captivating pictures...which in turn produce captivating conversations... and then captivating relationships. One perceptive social critic equates The Shmoooz’R phenomenon “like picking low hanging fruit. It’s easy to engage these people in spirited conversation because both of you want to.” In other words, the easiest thing in the world is talking to another ShmooozR wearer. As most people who know how to work a room admit, good conversations that lead to good relationships are anything but automatic.

Communication experts agree that the best conversations are topic-building, so networkers and budding conversationalists need topics of common interest at the ready. Ones they can build on: things like schools attended, vacation sites visited, books read, hobbies started, resolutions formulated and occupations trained for, etc. When everyone at an event is wearing a Shmoooz’R and compelling pictures almost pop out of the woodwork, Shmoooz’Rs actually boost the intensity of conversational interaction...like a chain reaction. Usually, nothing besides copious amounts of alcohol and pâté can make the same claim.

■ It’s All In The Talking Points

Shmoooz’Rs eliminate those common and awkward moments of introduction. **How so? Well, each** Shmoooz’R gives you 5 or more personal ice-breaker pieces of image-based information, like talking about your home town or where you went to school. This equates to 5 to 10 minutes of easy, direct and friendly conversation. In other words, it makes networking much more effective than if there weren’t any conversational guides available.

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