

## **Top Tips for Networking with Jeremy Taylor, Chief Executive, Cadia**

### **David Mellor**

I am here in Basepoint in Crawley with Jeremy Taylor who is the CEO of Cadia. Good afternoon Jeremy.

### **Jeremy Taylor**

Good afternoon.

### **DM**

Now we are gathered this afternoon to talk about the dark art of networking and I could not think of anyone better to talk to than Jeremy who is very much a leading light in this area. So Jeremy, can you tell us a little bit about the journey that brought you to being the CEO of Cadia and a little bit about what Cadia is?

### **JT**

Well yes of course. Cadia is the Gatwick Diamond business association. We are a representative body of businesses in and around the Gatwick airport area, predominately the RH postcodes. Businesses range from the very smallest sole traders and small businesses right the way up through people like Gatwick Airport, Virgin Atlantic, British Airways, so a complete range of businesses. What we aim to do is affect the economy in which we all work, and whether that is by providing opportunities for lobbying and pressure group work though bothering our MP's and the local authority which we do on a regular basis, or in its simplest form putting people into a room so that they can network with each other and find out what each other is buying and selling, then those both help businesses get on.

My journey here has been an interesting one. I know many people have a plan, my plan has always to be open to opportunities, so I worked predominately out of college in hospitality, retail, hotels and catering which gave me a very good understanding of how quickly and well you have to talk to people and how you have to look after them. I have a number of fundamental beliefs that I will refer to which is that most business transactions are actually based in a retail ethos and in retail if you are not nice to people and don't have what people want then they won't do business with you. So if you can talk to people and find out what they want then chances are that they will give you some money for something. So that was hospitality and retail.

In the early part of the 1990's in a previous recession I was made redundant. I wanted to spend time with my new family and ended up volunteering for this organisation Cadia Limited which at that point was Crawley and District Industries Association, hence the moniker. My job was to recruit people to the organisation; we were quite large, probably a bit bigger than we are now. We were a much bigger geographic area to the point that my predecessor decided that we would be the industries association for Sussex and Surrey which is good on the mileage allowance but quite difficult to service as it is a very

diverse area. Following that, in the late 1990's, I went into my own consultancy working with public sector agencies who wanted to engage with the private sector and that ranged from organisations like local authorities, chambers of commerce, Business Link right the way up to doing some consultancy and an engagement project with the DTI currently now known as BIS. That was really interesting work because there is a challenge for the public sector in that it is supposed to be there to assist with business growth but you have two fundamentally different mindsets. One is that in business you are there to take a risk and be rewarded, and in the public sector it could be argued that most people are promoted because they did not take a risk or it did not fail and so you have two counter cultures if you like. What we were trying to do was bring both of them together to talk to each other.

The journey is one where I believe that a huge amount of what I have done has led to where I am today. Whilst it maybe not the topic for the day I think as a learning area hospitality, catering and retail are to an extent excellent starting points because they will teach you to get on with people and if you can't get on with people then you are going to struggle in business. Even Alan Sugar is likeable at some point in his life. He has probably found it less necessary to be as likeable as he could have been once upon a time.

**DM**

Now, this subject of networking. Before I came over from investment banking in 2001, my perception of networking was pretty much the gin swilling brigade who would get together with their opposite numbers from different banks and would swap war stories. It is a bit of an eye opener to encounter networking as practiced in the broader business community. How would you define it?

**JT**

I suppose you could define networking in computing terms; connect two intelligent machines together so that they work better together. Intelligent machine might be stretching it in terms of some of the people you meet but the networking side is actually connecting people to each other. The key thing is that it is not enough to connect people together; it is listening to what people need. Put people in a room and if they don't listen then nothing happens. People are just projecting and talking. The networking is actually really finding out, really living up to the adage that it is not what you know it is who you know; it's the connections you can make with people. Where it really works is where two people bring organisations or structures or projects together to actually make something where the sum is greater than the parts. That can be different in so many ways. I think the key thing is that networking is not selling, it is about relationship building and that was why I was referring earlier on to issues like social skills and learning what to do with customers and so on and so forth. They are correlated and connected.

**DM**

I also think trust comes into that as well. As part of the building the relationships. Why do you think networking should be part of a business person's bag of tools or their activity during the working week?

**JT**

If you want to do business with someone it is very rare that you can just create something and sit back and wait for it to happen. The Kevin Costner film, "Field of Dreams"; "if you build it they will come", a lovely fantasy and quite a nice film, but the basic thing is that in the first place someone had invented baseball and therefore a demand for baseball so a field of dreams is one way that people could access baseball. It had to be created first and foremost. Unfortunately these days you can't open a door or window and expect the work to walk in; you have to go and find it. To find out what people want you have to talk to them, you have to listen and you also have to make sure what you do matches with what people are looking for. Business is about relationships and I remember once in one of my careers I was saying to someone at one of the local authorities we were working with, who had just given me a massive amount of work which was most welcome. The first thing I said was thank you, and the second thing was can I ask why they gave me this work? She said, and this was an interesting one, I made her look good. That was not a makeup and clothing issues but the fact that by her employing me to deliver a project her standing within the organisation was better. I think in business that if you can do something that makes people "look good" you can make their life easier; if you can smooth their career path, if you can cut their costs or help them make more money, then they will give you business.

Philosophy number two if you like is that business is very simple; you just have to help people make or save money. If you can do that then they will give you their money to show them how. If you can find something that does that. It is virtually impossible to create something from scratch without knowing what other people want. Business is about relationships, people buy from people and in order to understand what those people want you actually have to meet them first of all and networking is a very good way to do that. You referred to trust earlier and I think that what we try to do at our networking events is to create a space where people feel safe so that that the people that they meet and talk too trust the other people in the room and as a network facilitator sometimes we have to educate people, or ask them not to come back. It is a reality because you have to make the right space for people as well.

**DM**

In anticipation of this session I was thinking back to my very first experience of networking which was in 2001. I blundered into it, eyes wide shut. It was at the Hickstead Hotel, and probably the hottest evening of the summer. It was a session run by the IOD on director's duties and director's liabilities. It was run by a deeply uncharismatic accountant and backed up by a lugubrious lawyer and I think they were trying to scare the people there into spending money with them to protect themselves.

**JT**

I was there, Gavin from the IOD organised it!

**DM**

It was my first experience and when I was given the opportunity to tell everybody else what I did, this came as a complete shock to the system in terms of "what am I going to say" and I am just glad it was not recorded because I would hate to think what I sounded like. I learnt a lot about director's duties, even more about the fact that I was not quite ready to take maximum advantage of networking. Can you remember what your first experience was?

**JT**

I can't remember it exactly, I can remember in the early 1990's when I first worked for Cadia our role then as now was to organise networking and networking meetings. So my first event was probably one where I was freshly unemployed and I was there to make contact to see if I could find another job. I had no view or vision that I would end up working for Cadia I was just there as an unemployed executive open to opportunities. I was actually quite desperate, in terms of the fact I was hopeful that if I spoke to someone they might want to give me a job. The interesting thing is that people view networking as selling rather than being open to what the experience is and the great thing that you can do in networking is that you can listen to people and very very quickly you can gain an understanding of what works and what does not work, because you will hear from people and you will learn what works for you and what does not work for you. The more you do it the better it is; it's the old adage of the more practice I do the luckier I get. That was my first experience of networking. I am not too bold that I won't go to networking events and steal ideas and people have some great ideas. By that same token I will also look and think "oh dear". As a networking facilitator again, it is a lesson to take on board that events can be dominated by a personality to an extent that other people don't feel able to stand up and put themselves forward. My first experience of networking would have been in the early 1990's, it would have been scary and it would have been good practice, but we got there in the end. On another topic, I think I can actually remember the very first time I got up and spoke at a group that was there to learn, a learning seminar is very different. I did the handshaking card dropping stumbling awkwardly moment which made me think preparation is really important, and I would say that that applies to networking as well.

**DM**

Have you had any funny experiences at networking events? Either caused by you or someone else?

**JT**

I do find people laughable quite often, so that would be unfair to name names! What is funniest and in fact what can be, at the other end of the scale least funny is actually inappropriate behaviour. If I think about how we organise things and how I will talk and work it can be right on the edge and its knowing where their line is and where you cross it and where you don't cross it. I would think that is something that comes with experience. I would suggest

that I learnt what you can and can't say to people, particularly from my catering and hospitality days. If it starts to feel wrong then stop. The main thing is to bear in mind what is appropriate and what is inappropriate. I think the least funny moments is when you find out that someone has passed away or is suffering a serious illness where there is nothing you can say. The funniest are probably the most unintentional and slightly inappropriate, but on the good side. Know your audience.

**DM**

I love people watching. One of the best things about my previous life used to be covering southern Europe where you could spend time at some of the pavement cafes having a coffee or a beer and watching life go by. I used to love watching people and observe the human condition and I remember being at a networking event - I think it was at the Brighton and Hove Golf Club which is the one near Devil's Dyke. I was networking there and there was a lady from Brighton - I think feisty is the best word to describe her along with single minded; she came close to getting the networking equivalent of an ASBO. What was really funny, if she came into the room and there were already people there in clusters of two, three or four they used to go into closed groups because they did not want her to join. They knew they would just get her Gatling gun with her sales propositions. This is why she got warned about her future conduct. It was interesting that the second people eyed her coming through the door this kind of almost animal shuffle went on to freeze her out. You must have seen this?

**JT**

I have indeed. Our events are open to people coming to have a look at us for the first time and I think that one of the least funny was someone turned up with a clipboard and I had to point out that the approach he was making was too forceful, it was too salesly and that people were there to understand. His answer was "well until I hear no I assume it could be a yes". I replied that until you hear no it's because people are being polite. The other was a lady who, because of nerves more than anything else, was just outrageous and everyone felt uncomfortable and as the meeting progressed, people closed down and apart from two or three people who found her hilarious, which the rest of found a relief as we let them go and do their thing.

**DM**

There have been numerous books written about the habits of good leaders or the habits of good directors; have you any thoughts on the things that you see good networkers get right?

**JT**

It's a tricky one. The big thing is about listening. It's finding out what people do without being intrusive. I think listening and not assuming that everyone wants to do business with you. Be aware that some people might not. I think respecting other people's conversations - you have referred earlier to the group dynamic that comes together. When people are in a cluster and when you can see they are engaged with each other and you want to break into the

group, because there is someone you want to talk to, don't hover nervously trying to interject as you may break their relationship which will cause them to be irritated. There is no magic formula to getting someone's attention. What I might do is to say to people if there is a natural pause in the conversation just say can I get you in five minutes time, or can I get you a coffee and speak in five minutes time and then they know and they can make their own mind up as to when to do that. Know when to close, and when to move away. It's worth practising some kind of line along the lines of "well we are all here to make some business contacts so can we move on now".

I think in terms of the habits of good networkers, there is also something that comes with practice which is be prepared to be spontaneous. If people feel that you are pitching something that you have got off rote then it comes across as unnatural. It is worth having a few things in your armoury which are spontaneous but actually work quite well. I am a bit of a studier of stand up comics, and one of the things that they will have is an armoury of put downs. They are ready in their minds and have practiced and honed that and know what works and what does not work, but it appears spontaneous. It is about getting a structure about what you want to say but about making it fit and making yourself have empathy about what people want without being smarmy. The fundamental thing is though to listen.

#### **DM**

Two other things from past experience. The first is to do with memory. If you meet somebody and have a conversation even if it does not go anywhere for whatever reason then next time you meet if you can recall that, people notice. If they said, tomorrow I am going to do something and if you see them a month later you can say "how did it go"? That counts for a lot, people think, "he listened". The other thing is that if you promised to do something to help somebody else make sure you go away and do it and if you don't they are going to remember and think of you as hot air.

#### **JT**

I think that is a really good one. In any business relationship, it's about not being smarmy. If someone tells me where they are going on holiday for example, I will always remember to ask how it was the next time I see them. The subtext to that is when people recall their holidays, they recall it fondly so you immediately then reengage with them at a point where they are happy. It is something I have found seems to have worked. In another life I did some cold calling telesales and if I ever got through to someone who says that the person I was trying to contact was on leave I would always endeavour to find out what or where the holiday was so that when I reengage with them we have that common ground.

#### **DM**

We have already talked about some of these but as in all parts of business activity there are traps to avoid. Any thoughts for the rookie networker on things not to do?

**JT**

Don't assume anything. Don't assume people know what you do. If you are coming newly into business another thing is to not have a business that is just initials as people won't know what you do. Make things simple and easy but an assumption that either you are interesting or that you will be interested in everybody is a tough one to take. An assumption that you might know everything about their business – a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing as it can make you look like a fool. I would be wary about making assumptions. One of the other things is timing - knowing when to join, when to leave a conversation, how much time to give and take with people and how much time you have. I would avoid assumptions and especially in your early days as a network attendee, even to the point where don't assume where you are going. Get some thoughts on what you want to do and who you want to talk to.

**DM**

A few things that I have come across. Firstly, one you have already covered, don't go to networking with the intent to sell. Secondly, people can be so passionate about what they do, that they are bursting to tell everybody else and it's not actually that they are in sales mode, they are in evangelical mode and desperately trying to find a way of actually getting over what they do, even though they have no clue if it is relevant, they have no clue about whether it is relevant as it is far too early. Finally, you talked about keeping it simple, so avoiding jargon that no one is going to understand unless they have been in the same industry as you have., It is something, without wishing to single any one group out, you often get from IT, and HR professionals who have their own language.

**JT**

Insurance is another one. I was talking to an insurance company guy recently and told him that I was looking for a product that did xyz and he said you need this product. I asked him if it did xyz and he recommended another product. Finally I asked him what products he had that actually did what I wanted and this was a case of him not listening – he knew his products and I did not.

**DM**

I remember being at a networking event where there was the famous elevator pitch opportunity and this very earnest American lady stood up and introduced herself as trained hypnotherapist and NLP practitioner and for the other 58 seconds people were sitting with glazed eyes trying to work out what the first two seconds meant.

**JT**

Going back to my earlier point about the fact the business about helping people to make or save money or make them look good or make their life more convenient make something easier. How can you encapsulate what you do that helps people? There is a guy who came to one of our meetings. He was struggling and was in health insurance. I said well really, if I were to buy

your product it would be so that your staff were in hospital quickly. He said, fair enough, and he stood up and said "I put people in hospital" and immediately got people's attention and that was quite good. The other side of it is don't sing or clap, or don't fall into the trap of thinking that you have to find a gimmick, don't force a gimmick because that will backfire, we are a very cynical country and people, but if you can naturally do something that captures their attention. Also avoid the jargon. The health insurance guy could have stood up and said that he could provide you with a HR benefits programme etc etc and his audience would have no idea what he was talking about. What he should say is I can put your staff in hospital quickly and get them back quickly. That is what the insurance does.

### **DM**

It is using doing words rather than putting yourself in a box. How important are first impressions? You meet a lot of people coming to Cadia for the first time so you are probably as well placed as anyone to comment.

### **JT**

It is interesting, someone came to see me the other week, not for networking but he was a friend of someone I knew and he had been made redundant. I said I would spend an hour with him and have a chat about his options. He had not shaved properly and that was the only thing I noticed for the first ten minutes – I was looking at his chin thinking how he missed the spot. It just baffled me that he was going to see somebody about what he could do with his life without shaving properly. So I think the first impression means that you don't get totally distracted.

In one of my lives I did a series of networking events in the London borough of Sutton. A guy used to come along to that and the first time he came along he wore a suit and the suit jacket each panel was made of a different charcoal material. Pinstripe, check, all charcoal but had a different pattern within it. I thought what on earth is this? He was actually a magician who did a huge amount of corporate events and really entertaining guy. As soon as you knew what he did for a living, the strange jacket made sense. The other side of it was that he looked smart. He was wearing a regular shirt tie, trousers shoes with the unusual jacket. Your first impression has to reflect the personality you want to create. You have to build that impression over time with people. Fundamentally if you are going after a business that you will hope will spend a good amount of money with you then they are going to have to trust you and somewhere along the line someone is going to have to justify spending the money with you. The first impression is vital.

You need to think about how you present yourself so that people take you seriously. One of our members dresses for the occasion. If he is going to see a farmer, he will wear tweed, if he is going to our event he will wear a suit, if he is going to Brighton to talk about something, he will wear casual wear, he dresses appropriately to who he is seeing.

**DM**

The other thing I wanted to talk about is that things normally have to happen more than once before I take note. Three times in December I met people at different networking events, all of whom I was meeting for the first time and they were all either people I had been asked to see and I had encountered them one way or another via their website or via LinkedIn or via the Internet. This links to personal branding. In each case I was underwhelmed that the person I met was not the person I expected based upon their internet presence. They talked a good fight but when you actually met them it was not the same person, which immediately raises a question mark in your mind: is that really you? Firstly the photo was different, in fact the photo everywhere I encountered them was different. It was strange and it happened three times in quick succession and it made me think that there is something around the fact that there is a need for consistency about your face to the market and your message to the market.

**JT**

I think that is important. There was a local radio awards dinner recently and it was a bit of fun. The dress code was fun and fabulous so I thought I would go in pink shoes, which got some interesting comments and thoughts. But I would never do that unless I thought it was appropriate and safe. It is interesting because, Michael Coughlin, who was CEO of Crawley Borough Council, was negotiating with Grosvenor and John Lewis to come to town and he said you have to buy the Jermyn Street shirts. If you are going to meet John Lewis you have to wear Jermyn Street shirts. I thought – good point. Even if I have a day where I don't have meetings I will wear a suit and tie because I think people expect it. I have been in a previous existence and I had an appointment to meet some people at the Body Shop and boy did I stick out wearing a suit. I would rather do it that way round at that occasion rather than stand out everywhere else.

**DM**

Finally, to people who are just embarking on running their own business and networking what would be your top three tips?

**JT**

I would think the first one is be prepared to listen and learn. Be on time and be prepared, know what you are going to do and what to say. Don't expect to receive and be prepared to give. The second is that business is about what you can do to make their lives easier, how you can help them make or save money. Be prepared to interpret what people are doing. Third is don't expect to do business with everyone.

**DM**

The final one I would add is that there is no silver bullet, you can't just go once and say that does not work - you have to stick at. It is a marathon not a sprint. Jeremy this has been fun, thanks very much.