No, this is not a book on dieting. It is a book about networking and connecting with people who can help you and your career advancement. The book is divided into four sections with short chapters. Interspersed throughout are short one-page profiles of people who are particularly good at building relationships quickly (e.g., Bill Clinton, Benjamin Franklin).

While the profiles are anecdotally interesting, it is the rest of the book that really contains usable advice and action points. This review focuses on those chapters that have the most relevance for safety professionals. I discuss some high points in each section.

Section One: The Mind-Set
Chapter 1: Becoming a Member of the Club
Chapter 1 lays out the basic premise that real networking is about finding ways to make other people more successful. We’ve all done this: We get back from the PDC or some other conference and review all those business cards that we collected like trophies. After a few days we forget the face behind the card. We may go to LinkedIn and try to find them. Hopefully, there is a picture to jog our memories.

According to Ferrazzi, this just doesn’t suffice. If you do something to make others more successful, they’re more likely to value your relationship with them. The more relationships with value you have, the more valuable you become, not only to yourself, but to the world—your employers, your clients, peers and so on. It’s all about relationships.

Chapter 2: Don’t Keep Score
A key lesson of the book is that you shouldn’t keep score when it comes to networking. Tit-for-tat expectations don’t work in successful networking. If someone calls you up and asks for a favor that you can easily accomplish, do it and don’t look back. Relationships are not finite exchanges of one thing for another. Relationships are living, breathing entities. If you are going to take the time to connect with someone, you should be willing to try to make that person successful. Simply put, if s/he succeeds, you succeed. I have helped many fellow professionals, especially during trying times, with no expectation of repayment. My only satisfaction is that I was able to help them in a time of need.

Chapter 3: What’s Your Mission?
Networking is largely useless without goals. This book eloquently defines a goal as a “dream with a deadline.” I like it. The corollary for me is, “A dream without a plan is a nightmare.”

Ferrazzi offers a three-step plan for setting goals. First, find your passion: what do you truly love to do? What would you enjoy doing for the rest of your life? Next, put those goals down on paper and flesh them out. Finally, build a “personal board of directors” by finding ways to establish a connection with people in that field already. Do you know a group of professionals you can call to assist with your career growth? If you don’t, you ought to. Well, just how do you do that? The rest of the book explains how to accomplish this.

Chapter 4: Build It Before You Need It
The main idea of chapter 4 is that you should begin reaching out to others and building your network of contacts before you need it. This is called planning. Many of us wait until we need a network to build it, then bemoan the fact that it failed. The reason is obvious. Start early and maintain your network, so that when you need it, it is up and running like a well-oiled machine.
Ferrazzi offers several ideas on how to get started with this: join community groups that interest you; take leadership positions in hobby groups that interest you; enroll in a community college class on a topic of interest; or try to become involved with an approved work project that lets you interface with more people. What about volunteering for an ASSE position? Then, as you’re exposed to more people, gravitate toward those involved with things that you want to be doing from the goals you developed.

Chapter 5: The Genius of Audacity
Many people have difficulty being audacious when building a new connection; they want to appear humble and make a good first impression. The author suggests a different strategy: if you want something, be up front about it. It takes courage and a bit of talent, but Ferrazzi offers some guidance about how to find those things: find a role model, learn to speak, get involved and give it a shot.

The worst thing that can happen is that they say no, which is the same answer you already effectively have, so what do you have to lose? This works! When I was the principal investigator at Ford Aerospace, I was in charge of a prototyping system. I thought it had applicability to Ford Motor Co.’s simulator. I called the VP of research and development at Ford and got on his calendar. My boss asked me how I did it. My reply, “I just called.” As a result, I secured $1 million in funding, all because I was audacious.

Chapter 6: The Networking Jerk
I love chapter 6 because it basically says, “Don’t do anything like what you imagine a ‘networker’ to be like.” Instead, the author offers six rules which ensure that even as you try to build connections, you never become that kind of jerk.

First, don’t schmooze. Have something to say, say it with meaning, and focus on establishing a few good connections rather than spending your time surfing the room. Second, don’t rely on gossip because it paints a picture of untrustworthiness. Third, be willing to give something away—Ferrazzi uses the example of bloggers who give away content to their readers. Fourth, don’t treat those under you poorly. Fifth, be transparent. If you want to meet someone and are happy to meet them, say so. Lastly, don’t be too efficient—make genuine, individual connections. If you’re going to take the time to touch base with a contact, write to that person individually, don’t just include him/her on a mass e-mail to hundreds of people at once that starts off with the lead, “Dear close and personal friend <name>”.

The bottom line is to connect and give away information, insight and advice. It will all come back to you in spades.

Section Two: The Skill Set
Chapter 7: Do Your Homework
Once you’ve defined someone you wish to meet, the next step is to do your homework. Know who the person is (roughly), what their interests are, what they do, and especially what things you might have in common with them. “Google” them and go to their LinkedIn profile. The author even goes so far as to suggest making up short bios for each person you really want to meet at a particular meeting. This way, you’ll have something to break the ice with and also potentially flatter someone by knowing who they are. This takes time and effort. You can even take this a little further than conferences and meetings. When you schedule vacations, find out where the local ASSE chapter meets and attend the meeting. Engage the members, officers, speakers, etc. This way you can expand your network beyond your local sphere of influence.

Chapter 10: Managing the Gatekeeper, Artfully
The entire point of chapter 10 is simple: work as hard as you can to stay on the good side of administrative assistants. This is one of the best lessons in the book—never overlook administrative assistants, give them the brush off, or make their lives unnecessarily difficult. This is supported by the principle, be nice to everyone.
Chapter 11: Never Eat Alone
So, we finally come to the chapter that is the book’s namesake. The idea here is that a meal is a spectacular time to connect with someone. If you’re eating alone, you’re missing out on an opportunity. I agree with this sentiment, and it’s one of the reasons that I have to be careful balancing my brown-bag frugal style with the need to dine with certain people. In fact, the author suggests mixing and matching by inviting multiple people from different parts of your social network to eat with you, which can help build new connections and bring hidden ones to the forefront.

Chapter 13: Follow Up or Fail
Ferrazzi seems to treat this as the most important point in the book, so I’ll emphasize it too: When you make a connection, follow it up, whether with a note or an e-mail. Ferrazzi also strongly hints that a handwritten thank-you note shows a personal touch. With e-mail, people don’t write notes anymore. Writing a personal handwritten note shows warmth and caring that you took the time to sit down and write something personal. This will make you stand out.

Chapter 14: Be a Conference Commando
Chapter 14 offers extensive detail about how to maximize a conference in terms of meeting people, but what it really boils down to is discarding the preconceived notions of how a conference works. Generally, you should go intending to reach a wide audience by speaking and/or establish a good relationship with a small handful of people. Most importantly, though, is that you don’t sit there and do nothing, and don’t turn the conference into a vacation.

Before you go, make a list of people and schedule events or times to meet. This could be meals, events, etc., to use every opportunity to meet new people and build on current relationships. For many of us, the PDC is a vacation from work. This is counter to network building. To move forward, you must grow your network. The PDC should be viewed as work, not a vacation. Also, when you return, write up a trip report to yourself, a diary of all the things you did and learned. Believe me, if you don’t, you will forget it.

Chapter 15: Connecting With Connectors
In chapter 15, Ferrazzi address connecting with “connectors.” If this were a mathematical equation, connecting with others is addition, connecting with connectors is multiplication of your network. These are people who have an incredibly vast personal network. These people are obviously great to have a connection to. For ASSE members, connecting to the “movers and shakers” within our ranks is a great place to start. Surf LinkedIn from peers to elite safety professionals and invite them into your network. All they can do is say no.

Section 3: Turning Connections Into Compatriots

Chapter 18: Health, Wealth & Children
The best thing you can do to help another person is to directly affect one of the three things in the title of this chapter. Personal and financial health and the benefit of children are often direct keys to a person’s heart. If you can do something that helps a person in one of these areas, you’re often able to endear yourself to that person and establish a deep, long-lasting connection.

Chapter 20: Pinging, All The Time
Ferrazzi highly recommends picking out a few contacts and sending them a quick e-mail or making a phone call using your entire contact list—just contact them every once in a while to keep the connection alive. The chapter particularly recommends using birthdays as an opportunity to deliver a sharp ping, with a handwritten birthday note.
Section 4: Trading Up & Giving Back

Chapter 22: Be Interesting

Employees often clamor that safety is boring. But that doesn’t mean you have to be boring. No one wants to spend time around a boring person, so make yourself interesting. Beyond keeping up with current events and having a point of view on key issues, Ferrazzi offers several interesting ways to do this: ask seemingly stupid questions; always be open to learning something new and trying new things; take time out for vacations and spiritual growth; and never get discouraged if things don’t go well. My wife taught me years ago that when I am in a room with people I hardly know, ask 20 questions. Get people talking about themselves and you will find an opportunity to connect. Bye, bye boring.

Chapter 23: Build Your Brand

Ferrazzi goes beyond the idea of merely making yourself interesting. Rather, figure out what value you have for others. What do you want people to think of when they hear your name? Figure that out and cultivate it by focusing and behaving in ways that will cultivate the image that you want.

Chapter 24: Broadcast Your Brand

Chapter 24 is a primer on basic public relations—in other words, spreading the word about the image you want to cultivate. For me, writing articles and books is how I build my brand. I can’t tell you how many ASSE members have approached me and said, “You look familiar, do I know you from somewhere?” It’s all from my publications. By the way, these publications are also useful when interviewing. This is my way of broadcasting my brand.

Chapter 26: Getting Close to Power

Many people want to know how to get close to those who have decision-making power, but often the generic straightforward methods end with no return e-mail or call. Ferrazzi suggests a different route: try being involved with political fundraisers, attending conferences, joining nonprofit boards (like ASSE), among other activities.

Chapter 28: Never Give In to Hubris

This is a vital life lesson: If you ever begin to think that you’ve got it made, stop right now. It takes only one mistake to knock over the whole house of cards. The author tells a great story about getting caught up in the moment and making a complete jerk of himself by overselling what he had because of ego. Instead, be humble and realize that the connections you’ve already made are the really valuable ones, not the big one you’re hoping to make.

Chapter 29: Find Mentors, Find Mentees, Repeat

Ferrazzi astutely says that you should always be looking for a mentor, but you should also look for people you can help by being a mentor for them. This means that you should seek out help from others, but also be willing to step forward and lead others when the time comes.

Chapter 31: Welcome to the Connected Age

Never Eat Alone closes by referring to the age of the Internet, which affords many ways to make connections easier and to make yourself stand out. Ferrazzi presents an interesting look at the future from the perspective of someone who is skilled at connecting with people.

Conclusions

I recommend this book to many young professionals who want to know how to get started. It is also useful for mid-career people who have stalled out and want to rejuvenate their network. I have mentioned many of these concepts in my books, Out of the Box and Climbing the Corporate Ladder—Safely. My books are, simply put, helping others learn from my mistakes. Early in my career, it didn’t take me long
to figure out that I couldn’t go it alone and succeed. As much as I wanted to be self-reliant, having friends in the right places has boosted me to heights I could never have achieved alone. For those who wish, this book lays out a plan to build and sustain your network. Your career will be the better for it.

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