# Business Brainstorming & Network Exchange *Standards of Mutual Respect*

It’s our goal as organizers and members to cultivate and uphold utmost integrity and to promote a supportive, trustworthy, non-threatening environment among members of the reorganizing Business Brainstorming & Network Exchange group. In line with this goal, participants should understand and respect the ethical standards that establish a firm foundation for its realization. BBNE welcomes and enthusiastically embraces those whose intentions and behaviors align with the following *Standards of Mutual Respect,* which are designed to dissolve some of the issues that are not so uncommon within business networking groups:

1. **Unless otherwise specified, the information gleaned from this group should be treated as, for the most part, confidential and proprietary.** In other words, it’s not for “resale” by business coaches, consultants or others who might be inclined to pass information about the business models and methods of group members on to others who might be cultivated or empowered as their competitors; nor are the uncommon tips, ideas and procedures of other group members to be used to showcase a member’s own expertise without permission from and appropriate attribution to the member who brought the tip/idea to the table.
 This touchy issue is what exclusive business networking groups aim to skirt by allowing only one representative of any specific business (one shoe maker, one website designer, one real estate agent, etc.) into the group at a time. Those groups, however, typically charge $300-plus for annual membership. We’re not exclusive, nor do we charge dues. In exchange, we require discretion. As important as it is to address this issue, it's often kept at a 10-foot-pole distance in non-exclusive networking groups, which is why I’m addressing it now.
 While the associated fine lines can be hard to identify sometimes, there is a difference between coming to a group to exchange ideas and advice with people who may be using it, not as your direct competitors, to increase their potential for success in their individual areas of business and expertise, and coming to a group to mine the ideas of others in order to become or empower their competitors. The former is a noble endeavor; the latter would be untrustworthy and dishonorable behavior for this group.
 I disagree with the notion that “there are no new ideas” and that the best one can do is to copy or expand upon the ideas of others. With new circumstances, lifestyles, technologies, needs and abilities come new ideas, every day, from people everywhere. I encourage people to honor and support the original ideas of others—especially those within their own personal and professional circles—and to spend their own valuable time and creative energy cultivating their own new ideas rather than hijacking those of others. I’ve never known a good copycat to be what I’d consider a great leader.
 When we discover that simultaneously/individually original ideas overlap and/or almost mirror each other, we need to be especially careful and integrity-minded. While some will advise spying on, demeaning or otherwise trying to undermine the competition for a leg up, others (I included) would recommend directing one’s innate creative energy and resources where they thrive best—in one’s own unique creative realm—and perhaps even teaming up with the other in some complementary way. Fair and honest competition is the high road; gutter tactics attract steamroller treads. And Karma has eyes in the back of her head.
2. **Be chill; don’t judge.** By the end of a busy workday most of us have expended our best efforts and are ready to be off-guard, more relaxed in communication and candid about our vulnerable points in business. Any show of disorganized thought, low energy, etc. should not be perceived as weakness or as necessarily representative of a fellow member’s level of operation or professionalism during his/her “on” hours.

 Personally speaking, for example, unless I have something to lead, present, etc., the professional side of my brain shuts down after about 7 p.m. (since I’m usually up by 5 a.m.) and I’m more geared for a casual exchange of good information among good people than I am concerned about making impressions or reciting perfect elevator pitches.

 When we’re tired and in off-duty mode, we may be less clear-minded and articulate than we are in business; we may sound less focused and more in need of direction than usual. Our BBNE meetings should be considered a safe place for relaxed and supportive interaction among members. After-hours brain fog should not be judged as flaky, disorganized or necessarily representative of another member’s conduct or thought process in business.

 In other words, we’ll treat one another as we would treat friends and family members retreating to a nurturing environment after a long, busy, maybe even disheartening day. Grumbles, bumbles and fumbles forgiven. We don’t “thin slice” human beings here, we cut them due slack. ;)

1. **For now, *fair*, *relevant* and *intelligent* points and discussions about the effects of political principles are not considered taboo or off limits.** I realize that this flies in the face of what many other nonpolitical groups consider appropriate, but I believe that it’s O.K., and these days sometimes necessary, to discuss policies, assumptions and mindsets that impact us as small-business owners and tax-paying American citizens. I’d like for us to be free to do so without eliciting gasps and daggers.
 However, unless such a discussion is pre-planned, or continuation of an impromptu discussion is unanimously accepted, political discussion should be kept brief and should not dominate a meeting. At all times, political discussion should be conducted with the same respect for members and their various points of view as we would show during discussions about less provocative topics. If unsure about the appropriateness of a comment, please refrain for further internal reflection.

Here’s to our success,

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