Sometime last week, a friend of mine from Lexington, KY, sent me an article he found on the internet about networking. It was written by Lillian Vernon, the woman who started the Lillian Vernon catalog.

After reading the article, I added it to my pile of other networking articles and realized that I have read dozens and dozens of articles just like the one written by Ms. Vernon. I have also read many books written about networking too. Some of my favorites are "Dig Your Well Before You're Thirsty" by Harvey McKay, "Power Networking" by Donna Fisher, and my newest favorite, "The Tipping Point" by Malcolm Gladwell.

While I am always searching for new information regarding networking, I missed one of the greatest sources of networking information in the world: YOU!! I have spoken to tens of thousands of people, have met tens of thousands more, but I never have spent the time asking them about their feelings towards networking.

Well, I have corrected that little oversight by sending out a networking survey to 1500 people who read "Networking Central," my monthly networking e-newsletter. The survey consisted of 12 questions covering simple things like "Do you know how to network?" to more detailed questions such as "What specific fears do you experience when networking?" While all the questions provided me with good information, the first five were the most telling and I found the results to be fascinating. Allow me to share some of them with you.

1. Do you believe that networking works? - 87% of people said yes, 11% said somewhat, and 2% said no. While this question didn't unearth any real gems for me, it at least validated that people believe in the whole process of networking and understand its importance in business.

2. Do you know how to network? – Only 54% of people said yes, 43% of people said somewhat and 2% said no. These numbers were quite surprising to me because I was sure that more people would have said that they knew how to network. I have asked hundreds of people this question and most of the time, the answer is always yes. Maybe people don't want to admit that they don't really know how to network. My father always taught me that once you acknowledge that there's a problem (not knowing how to network), it's only then that you can go about overcoming it.

3. Do you enjoy networking? – 55% of people said yes, 32% said somewhat and 13% said no. It would be easy to assume that the people who said they liked networking were the ones who did it on a regular basis. Unfortunately, a large number of those people who said they only liked networking a little or didn't like it at all are the ones who attend many of the events. The good news here is that these people understand the need for meeting and connecting with others, but the bad news is that they experience serious fear or discomfort when they do go out.

4. Do you consider yourself to be an effective networker? 39% of people said yes, 45% said somewhat and 18% said no. I was shocked to see that almost two-thirds of people that responded said they didn't think they were effective networkers. I applaud their honesty but are they doing anything about their current level of effectiveness? If people are willing to admit that they're not great networkers, are they willing to strive to get better? If 87% of people feel that networking works, when will these people wake up and see the opportunities they are missing?

5. Do you believe that networking is a learning skill? – 86% of people said yes, 14% said somewhat and 1% said no. These results, without a doubt, were the most frustrating ones of the bunch. While I'm thrilled that so many people feel that they need to learn how to network, it KILLS me that more people aren't taking action and doing what it takes to become a powerful networking professional. If they know that networking works and they know it's a learned skill, what is the missing piece?

After analyzing all the results and thinking about this for days, I came to a few conclusions.
1) People have a love/hate relationship with networking. They know that it can help in every aspect of their lives but they aren't very comfortable doing it.

2) People have the desire to become better networkers but they don't know where to go or what to do to obtain this valuable education.

3) I need to make it MUCH easier for people to obtain the networking education they desire. This needs to be done through more general public workshops, increased effort at the Chamber of Commerce level, and more specific information from this column.

My little survey was a serious wake up call for me. While I have done some great work so far, my journey has just begun. Thanks to all of you who have helped me up to this point; I'm ready to step up and do everything I can to make all of you the best networkers you can be. See you next month.