

THE ART OF NETWORKING

“Once in awhile you get shown the light in the strangest of places if you look at it right”



By: Jill Matlow

If you're like me, you're not a big fan of networking events. You know the drill. Get dressed in professional attire, grab your business cards and rehearse your canned "elevator speech" before you arrive. The whole scenario always felt so forced and impersonal. Don't you agree?

Which is why after reading about the Wall Street Dead aHead Networking Events™ for the last 4 years, I had to check it out. Something about this "business model"—bringing together professionals who also love the Grateful Dead—struck a chord with me (no pun intended).

It was time for me to finally reach out to Deborah Solomon, the founder of Wall Street Dead aHead Networking Events™, who is also an investor in the Small and Micro Cap Space. With her financial savvy and love of the Dead, she is the perfect person to orchestrate this event. And if you'd pardon the corporate jargon, Deb does her "due diligence"—she had already researched my background before she invited me in for an informal meeting.

On the day of my appointment, I checked in with the receptionist and made a quick trip to the ladies room. The wait time felt like 20 minutes. As I was walking through the hallway maze to locate another bathroom, a tall slim woman approached me. It was Deb Solomon. With a big smile on her face, she took my coat and said *"I'll stand right here so that you don't get lost on your way back to my office"*. I immediately loved how down-to-earth Deb was and knew her networking event had to be different.

Fast forward to October 20th.

Growing in popularity each year, this event was sold out by August with a waiting list in the hundreds. I was grateful that I had confirmed my reservation months ago. This was the first time I remember being excited about attending a networking event, instead of the usual dread I used to anticipate walking into a roomful of strangers.

We're all familiar with that awkwardness that comes with initial introductions and shaking hands at a networking event, as we simultaneously try to juggle our drinks or appetizers. But this event was different as I already had an "ice breaker"—sharing a mutual love for the Grateful Dead! I felt comfortable walking up to anyone in the room and introducing myself as I knew we already had something to talk about—our "ice breaker"—then on to business.

Tir Na Nog, an Irish bar located on West 39th Street, proved to be the perfect venue for hosting such an event. Feeling more relaxed after our initial introductions, everyone was able to then enjoy lively conversations, an open bar, tasty hors d'oeuvres and tunes being played by "The Deadbeats", a fantastic jam band.

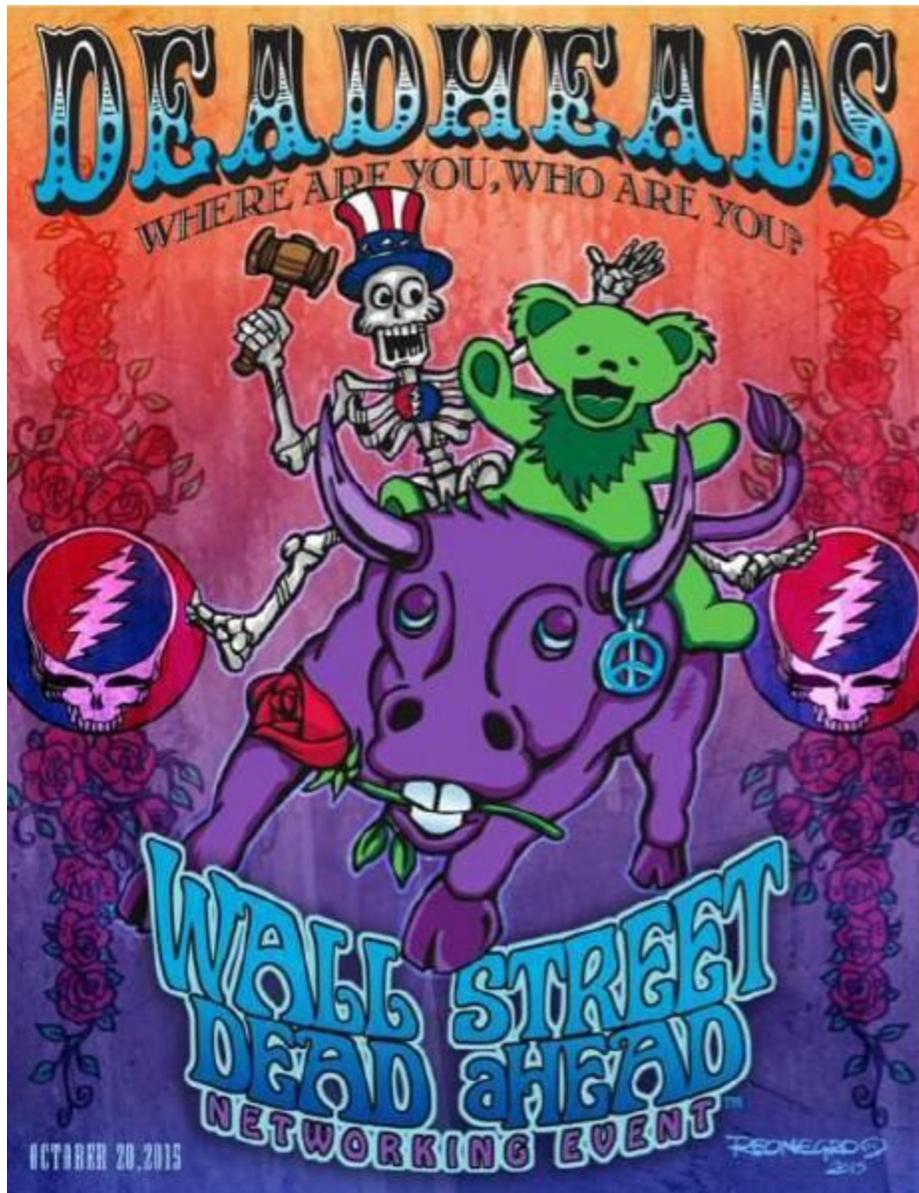
The attendees and sponsors—most of them middle-aged and dressed in suits, jeans and everything in between—had flown in from all over the country. It was reassuring to see that like me, my contemporaries were also looking to make new connections, and I was excited to meet professionals from so many different industries.

Strangers stopping strangers, just to shake their hand...

Early in the evening, I had the distinct honor of meeting Ken Hays, who founded the Gathering of the Vibes 20 years ago. A more humble guy you would not meet. Photographer Marc Millman, Artist and Graphic Designer Antonio Reonegro (who designed original backstage passes for the Grateful Dead), Author Jerilyn Lee Brandelius of the Grateful Dead Family Album, and Cameron Sears, Executive Director from the Rex Foundation, were also in attendance.

A-listers, but certainly the most down-to-earth group of people, who helped to create a warm vibe the entire evening. There were no name tags so everyone was on the same playing field. It was refreshing not to be intimidated by these 'rock stars'.

When the evening was over, I left with a goody bag replete with practical, kitschy promotional items and a colorful tee shirt housed in a black knapsack with a white embroidered Wall Street Dead aHead Networking Events™ logo and peace sign. In addition, a booklet (aka the “Set List”) showcasing each sponsor’s and attendees’ business information (along with their favorite Dead song) was also included. I know this booklet will be invaluable to me as I begin reaching out to new contacts in the future.



Design by Antonio Reonegro

How often do you leave a networking event with the intention of contacting someone from the stack of business cards you've collected, only to freeze up at the thought of making that first call or writing that first email? I learned that night that "ice breakers" can be so helpful in these scenarios. Finding a common denominator (in this case, a love of the Dead) is an easy way to segue into your first conversation or email with a new professional contact.

I'm excited to shuffle through the "Set List" of attendees, and introduce myself to them. It was as though we all felt like family by the end of the night! My goal is to recreate this same feeling of camaraderie at future networking events I attend. And I've learned that you just never know who you might meet when you step out of your comfort zone.

Maybe you'll find direction, around some corner where it's been waiting to meet you...

Keeping things fresh, as well as expanding our professional circles, is crucial in today's challenging job market, especially for baby boomers. Which is why I am now reevaluating the benefits of networking events with a whole new perspective, thanks to the Wall Street Dead aHead Networking Events™ opening up my eyes.

Are you a fan of networking functions or do you tend to shy away from them? Do you have any networking events lined up for the future? Do share your stories with us and feel free to provide any pointers on how you best navigate those events.

And if you go, no one can follow, that path is for your steps alone...