

Nurturing Networking/Branding Bonding

I recently had the good fortune to attend two unusual and exciting networking events.

The first, sponsored by [New England Women in Energy & the Environment \(NEWIEE\)](#), featured [Federal Energy Regulatory Commissioner Sudeen Kelly](#).

The second, at [Seltzer Design](#), featured Senior Designer Annie Smidt of Seltzer and Rachel Hayes, Vice President of the [Wellesley Hills Group](#) branding firm, both of whom focused on what Seltzer calls “Brandparenting.”

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At WIEE on April 28, founder and executive director Judy Chang introduced Kelly, who, to everyone’s surprise, said that instead of speaking about energy, she would talk about women—basing her remarks on *Why Women Should Rule the World*, the 2008 book by former White House Press Secretary Dee Dee Myers.

While one might have hoped that things would have changed by the time Bill Clinton entered office, given what we now know about him, it’s hardly shocking to learn that Myers ran into sexist treatment—nor did Kelly have much new to report on male/female leadership styles.

Still, in closing, Kelly made a refreshing suggestion: rather than “network” to achieve a purpose, she said, we should “just talk.” Which we did—often, quite openly.

While most women waxed enthusiastic about their rapidly growing field, one senior consultant confessed that she was

tired of her work; a government worker was frustrated with the state's environmental bureaucracy; another said that she had given copies of Myers' book to members of her husband's family who complained to her that Hillary (Clinton) is "shrill."

Hoping for equally frank comments from Kelly, I asked her about her impressions of the Obama administration; she diplomatically pointed out that her commission does not make policy, but that, the Obama team does, at least, listen.

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At a breakfast session (held May 8 in Seltzer's downtown office at the ungodly hour of 7:30 am) , we participants were invited to introduce ourselves—including one way in which we nurture that does not include tending to children or plants. This was a first for me—at a business meeting.

An administrative assistant said she works with hospice patients; a lawyer gives time to nonprofits; another had taken up painting. I mentioned my clients, my artistic spirit and my upcoming photo show (more on that, soon).

Smidt showed photos of herself, growing up, to outline the phases of brand development—and what's required for care and feeding as a company grows.

Hayes defined "brand" as "the sum of activities that cause people to know your name, articulate what you do, and have the impression that because of interactions they want to hire you".

She described the results of a Wellesley Hills study showing the elements most often used by potential clients in choosing professional service firms. (Referrals, presentation and the Web site were the top three; more at <http://www.raintoday.com>).

My favorite line was a quote Hayes borrowed from St. Francis Assisi, via James Carville: “Go Forth and teach the gospel—speak, if necessary.”

After the meeting, Seltzer emailed a followup note thanking the participants for attending—and included a notice about my upcoming photography exhibit.

Because the people at both meetings were open and supportive, I came away feeling enlightened, energized and enthusiastic about bringing nurturing and community spirit to my own marketing and client work—and wondering if (hoping that) inspirational new ways of doing business can prevail—despite the economic downturn.

New Cambridge Observer is a publication of the [Harris Communications Group of Cambridge, MA](#).

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