



Varia  
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# It IS a small world: the "6 degrees of proximity"

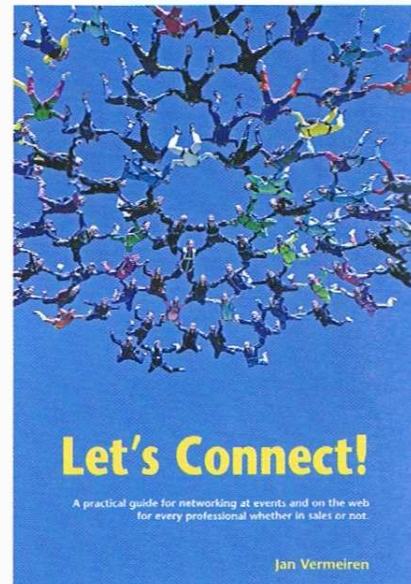
Do you remember the last time you were on a holiday and met another compatriot? Ten to one you discovered you had a mutual contact and that one of you made the remark: "It is a small world, isn't it?" This happens a lot on holidays. It even seems that this happens more abroad than in our daily lives. Is this a coincidence? Or is there more?

It is not that odd. We indeed live in a small world. The first person who started doing research in this area was Stanley Milgram. In his 1967 "small world experiment" the theory of the "6 degrees of separation" was born. This theory states that everybody in the world is connected via 6 steps (read: people). Several other studies between 1967 and today have proven that this is indeed the case.

Let's also look at this theory from another angle, from a more mathematical one. Let's assume that everybody has on average 250 contacts (professional and private ones). Each of these 250 contacts also has 250 contacts. If we conservatively assume that you know half of those people yourself then every contact of yours knows 125 people you don't know yourself. This means that in the second degree you have access to 31.250 people. And that is where the real power of networking is: in the second degree. You don't only have many more opportunities, you also have a bond of trust via your mutual contact.

This principle of the "6 degrees" that I call the "6 degrees of proximity" (if you can contact anyone in the world via only 6 people you are rather connected than separated, aren't you?) can also be found on the online networking websites LinkedIn ([www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)) and OpenBC ([www.openbc.com](http://www.openbc.com)). You don't only see how many people you can reach in second degree, but also who these people are.

What is the value of this insight for me? That we can deal with each other in a different way on events, cocktail drinks, online networks and other networking functions. Too often participants of events don't feel comfortable because they feel like having to "sell" themselves or their organisations (see the article in the previous issue about the difference between selling and networking). And because they don't like someone else approaching them with this attitude they don't want to radiate this themselves to others as well.



Cover of the book *Let's Connect!*

But if you know that the greatest value of the network is in the second degree, you can deal with people in a different way than "selling". In your next conversation on a networking event, look and listen for what the other person can do for your network and your network for him. And the other way around: what the network of this person can do for you and you for his network. You won't only discover more opportunities, but also have another kind of conversation and more enjoyable one!

PS: if you discover that you and the person you are talking to can help each other or can do business with each other, don't miss this opportunity! You don't have to exclude yourself and only think about the needs of your network instead of your own. However, by starting your conversation with this networking attitude, you can get another kind of conversation with surprising results!

This is an excerpt from the book "Let's Connect!" ([www.letsconnect.be](http://www.letsconnect.be)) by the Networking Coach, Jan Vermeiren (for a free networking e-course, visit [www.networking-coach.com](http://www.networking-coach.com)).

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