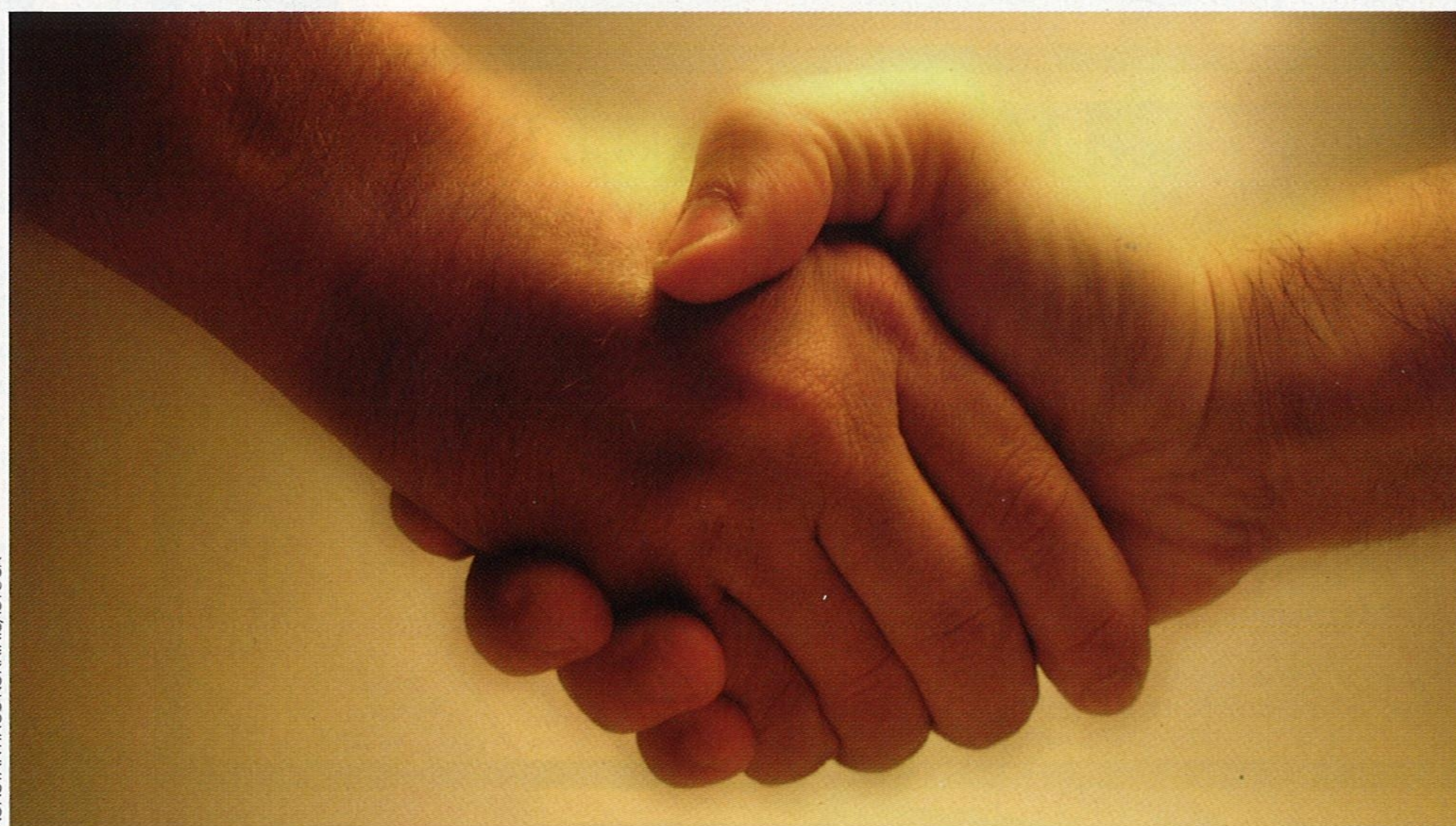


Shrinking the World



Expanding Connections

Entrepreneurs take advantage of networking connections BY NICOLE BRADFORD



KONSTANTINOS KOKKINIS/ISTOCK

As the saying goes, it's lonely at the top. Perhaps nobody knows this better than the entrepreneur who faces cutthroat competition in business, while struggling to manage employees, streamline operations and increase revenue. But, entrepreneurs, whether high-powered attorneys or hot dog vendors, all stand on common ground when facing daily challenges.

That is the basic principle behind the Entrepreneurs' Organization, an international support network among entrepreneurs, who despite having different careers share the same opportunities and obstacles.

"The No. 1 shared trait of people who are both successful and significant is their ability to build significant networks," Scott Blanchard, workplace coach and author, said at a recent Texas EO retreat.

Founded 20 years ago, the organization now

boasts more than 6,000 members worldwide. Members own and operate their own companies, share a common desire to develop their businesses, learn from others and share their experiences.

Houston attorney Lance Lubel founded his own law firm after establishing himself as an experienced trial lawyer, and joined EO after much coaxing. Lubel eventually found EO to be a lifeline that, according to him, "changed his world."

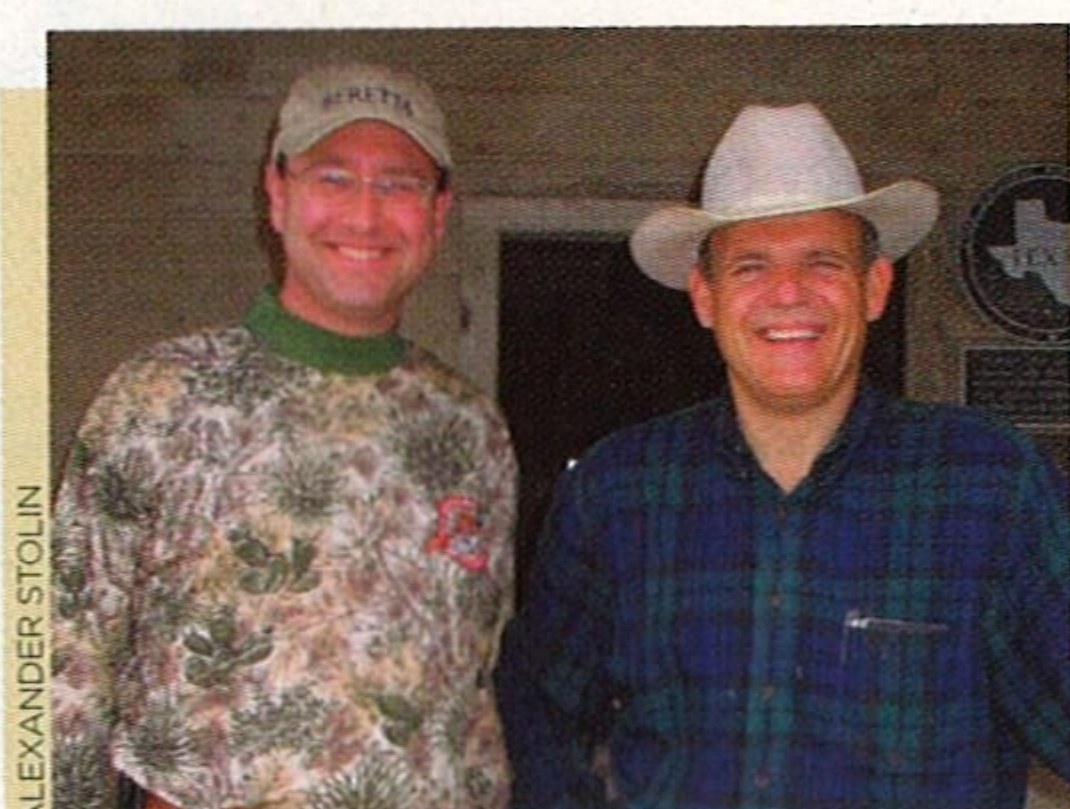
"If you're working for the man, you don't control your own destiny," Lubel says.

Like many fledgling businesses, Lubel's company struggled with "grossly inadequate" start-up funding and getting off the ground. Soon afterward, the firm resolved its first case and eased its financial growing pains.

The difficulties that all entrepreneurs face give them a common bond, which is perhaps why meetings give way to frank and encouraging conversation.

Robert Wagnon, CEO of Houston-based Republic State Mortgage, says he will always remember something Lubel said to him while discussing a business issue. "He looked me in the eye and said, 'Robert, you have as good an instinct as anyone I know. What does your gut tell you?' That message always helps me distill an important issue."

Likewise, Lubel says he found a statement from Wagnon to be equally valuable. "Robert said to me, 'Lance, it is impossible to know where your next significant relationship will come from.'"



Lubel's firm, Heard Robins Cloud & Lubel, LLP, represents personal injury victims. Lubel is the lead lawyer for a Fortune 20 company in property tax and a certified contract advisor for the NFL Players Association.

Robert Wagnon is the CEO of Republic State Mortgage. He has served on the Board of Trustees of the Houston Chapter of the Entrepreneur Organization, and as chairman of the Membership, Forum, Inventory of Skills and Learning committees.

Lubel and Wagnon were in an EO forum of 10 business owners aiming for diversity amongst its members; no other attorneys or mortgage bankers were involved in this group.

"It took me about six months to really understand the program," Lubel says. "It was pretty odd to sit in a room with 10 people and admit you don't know something about your business. About 50 percent of the discussion was about business, and the other 50 was personal."

The EO group opened Lubel's eyes to new ways of thinking and dealing with partners, adversaries and family. He says that "everyone brings a different perspective. You don't give advice; you share your experiences. I saw things from a non-lawyer's perspective, and my partners, here, will tell you that it drastically changed my life."

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