

GET CONNECTED NOW!

The Power of Networking [Part 1]

By Robbie Motter

Long before it became a business buzzword, successful people have been networking—meeting people, making contacts they can use to help achieve their goals.



DEFINITION

By definition networking involves the planned acquisition of contacts for mutual support. Networking is the exchange of information and the transaction of business to benefit your professional and personal life. It is also the process of developing and using your contacts for information, advice and moral support. It is giving help and serving as a resource for your business and personal contacts.

You may ask why network? The answer is simple—for information, advice and knowledge of opportunities.

FUNCTIONS

As a business person, you continually need goods and services, from paper clips to legal advice. You can use the networking to develop a resource pool you can access.

Networking is also a means of making acquaintances. Some people you meet will never need your services, or you theirs. But they can still be an important resource. They can introduce you to other acquaintances. They can refer business to you or you to them. And some networking contacts develop into lasting friendships.

A primary function for networking is developing business contacts that will benefit your bottom line.

There is much cross-over between these various functions. Obviously, you don't walk into a room with the intent of only making business contacts, ignoring all other possibilities. Effective networking usually has a domino effect. A contact that starts as an acquaintance may refer you to someone that refers you to someone else, and so on and on, building an endless chain of profitable referrals, leads, contacts, friends, clients and advisors.

CATEGORIES

Define your present NETWORK and set up a peoples resource chart. Identify people you already know or know of and can readily connect with and separate these people into different categories. Ask yourself some very important questions as you are putting this list together.

1. Over the last year, who has been most supportive?
2. Who has supplied the most important information?
3. Who has brought me the most business or contacts?
4. What three people have you done something for in the last 12 months?
5. Who has benefited the most from your information?

6. Define your vertical "upward" NETWORK, the people you would list as advisors.

The final categories may end up looking like this:

- 1) Professional: Employers, co-workers, business clients or members of organizations you belong to.
- 2) Personal: Friends, classmates.
- 3) Family: Yours and your spouse if married.

Now take the three categories and break them down into the following:

- a) People who assist or have assisted you in getting your job done. i.e. secretary, receptionist, etc.
- b) People who you respect in your field and others, and who you would recommend to others.
- c) Mentors, these are people who have helped you currently and in the past
- d) Role Models, these are people you look up to, these do not have to be people you have met.
- e) People who constantly refer you to additional resources.
- f) People who challenge you or are your competitors.
- g) People who constantly promote you or your business.

What the above steps do is to help you understand just what a strong data bank you already have and will help you quickly identify who to call when you need anything. REMEMBER, ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS ASK, AND CLEARLY IDENTIFY WHAT IT IS YOU WANT AND/OR NEED.

THE NEXT STEP

The next step would be to write after each person all that you know about them, what business they are in, are they married/single, what are their hobbies, what sports do they like, etc. The more you know about a person, the stronger your database will be. For instance, if you find someone is strong in sports and belongs to a country club, that lets you know that this person may be playing golf with just the person you need to meet, because that person you are trying to reach also belongs to the same club.

ONE VERY IMPORTANT THING TO REMEMBER ... THERE IS NO ONE ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD THAT YOU CANNOT MEET IF YOU REALLY WANT TO ... ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS TELL PEOPLE YOU KNOW AND MEET SO AND SO ... AND BELIEVE ME, IT WILL HAPPEN. YOU NEVER KNOW WHO KNOWS WHO!

THE PLAN

Plan to use your NETWORK

Set up a NETWORK strategy for the next six months:

1. List three people you are going to call.
2. List four people you are going to "put together."
3. List three fabulous things about yourself and repeat these to the people you meet (people will remember you by what you tell them and will repeat it to others).
4. List three people you are going to write.
5. List three people you are going to meet.

As with other business endeavors, networkers should set goals. For example, you might set a goal of attending two professional group meetings each month, and making at least 10 new contacts at each. By reaching that minimum, you've guaranteed 240 contacts per year! If more than one person from your company also attends, separate to multiply your contacts.

Don't pass up opportunities to Network!

Give seminars or talks to professional organizations in your specialty to maximize your exposure.

The most important thing to remember in networking is that it is not a one-time magical cure-all. The benefits of networking are long-term and on-going.

SELF INTRODUCTIONS

Generally, all attending a networking function share a common interest, so that you are not really with strangers. To help you feel more comfortable, look for what you have in common with people at an event.

You could wait forever if you wait to be introduced. Have a planned self-introduction that is clear, interesting and well delivered, and if talking about your business, make sure it clearly identifies what it is you really do. What you will say about yourself will depend on the nature of the event.

Say your Name. What you Do..With Energy! Rehearse a quick 8 to 10 word description of your business or service. Provide essential information and something interesting that may engage people in conversation!

MOVE FROM GUEST TO HOST BEHAVIOR!

Hosts exhibit gracious manners, meet people, starting conversations, introducing others and making sure their needs are met! Hosts are concerned with the comfort of their guests and actively contribute to that comfort.

CHECK YOUR BUSINESS CARDS

Business cards give people a tangible, physical way to remember you and something they can slip into their wallet, rolodex, desk, etc. The excuse, "I just gave out my last card" smacks of poor planning. NEVER be without your cards, no matter where you go.

Devise a system for carrying your cards and collecting cards from others.

Never, never throw away the business cards you collect for follow-up. Set up a filing system. Remember, even though you may not need their product or services, you don't know who this person might know.

Write something on the other person's card to help you remember them. Ask them what their company does and what they do and write it on the card. Also, it in your conversation with Jim Jones, you learn he is a Padres fan, a note on his card will remind you of your common interest. The next time you talk, you'll have a "starting place" to continue. Also, add on the card the date and location you met him.

Don't pass out brochures. They are expensive and bulky, use them for follow-up.

If you want to give your card to someone, but they have not asked for it, ask for theirs first. Most people will respond in kind. Give cards to people that you want to call you.

Be prepared with small talk. It is essential. It is bad manners to monopolize a conversation, it is equally bad manners not to talk enough! A bore is someone that lacks small talk. Silence is not golden—it is the kiss of death.

Small talk should intrigue, delight, amuse, fill time pleasantly. Anything will do. Use timely news stories.

Be a good listener. Get people to talk about themselves and listen with your ears and your face! One of the nicest compliments you can give is to ask questions about their business. Let them talk about themselves.

Remember eye contact and a smile. They are critical!

You want to establish a strong enough relationship for the networker to distinctly remember you and your conversation when you make your follow-up call.

Be sure to read Part 2, focusing on when you make your entrance as well do's, don'ts and how to's.

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