

Quality Networking for Real Results—a Learned Skill

Mention networking and you'll be greeted with groans or grins; there's no middle ground. Today's marketplace has promoted networking to a frenzy of non-effective activity; true networking, a learned skill, involves quality, not quantity.

If you're looking to increase the quality of your networking efforts, begin with your attitude. Networking for real results means pursuing opportunities that benefit multiple parties. It involves building relationships and resources rather than exchanging business cards and telephone numbers.

When you network for real results follow up and continued dialogue are involved. Consider attending an event with the goal of establishing two to three strong contacts with relationship potential. How do you accomplish this? Focus on the person. Rather than sell, inquire. Find something in common with that person and listen to the challenges they face. At the end of a conversation, exchange business cards. Send your new contact a magazine article of interest, or a brief note expanding on a comment or question from your conversation. In that way, you'll come to be regarded with credibility.

If you listen, you'll hear opportunities to be of service. Perhaps the business owner whose roof leaked needs a roofer and you know of one or you can recommend a great printer for the flyers someone is planning to distribute. To network well, you must create a plan for follow-up and continual dialogue with those members of the network who **you can assist**, and can assist

you with real resources or business at some time in the future.

It's easier to network effectively if you choose associations and/or events for which you truly have passion and concern. I suggest the passion element because networking takes a great deal of prime time to be effective. Some of the daily networking opportunities you might encounter include: your school and its alumni association, a religious affiliation or charity, neighborhood associations, local, government or community activities, clubs and nonprofits.

While you have many networking potentials, narrow the focus by asking questions such as: Will I regularly attend this meeting? Do I like this cause enough to really participate? Regularity will augment people's professional view of both you and your firm. Reality is that you get back what you put into the networking effort. Used effectively, networking can result in a majority of your future business.

Statistics show that 60-80% of business comes from referrals; referrals are real results from networking. As Zig Ziglar says, "You can have everything you want if you'll just help enough other people get what they want."

The fact is that networking will continue to grow as the complexity and size of the marketplace grows. Your success involves a commitment to mastering the skills involved.

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