



Networking With Purpose

Attending and Creating Successful Networking Opportunities

Do you use every opportunity to network? Are you ready and "on" when a situation presents itself for you to expand your relationship network? The other day I was on a flight sitting next to a gentleman that slept most of the way. When he woke up 30 minutes before landing he turned to me and struck up a conversation. Soon the conversation turned (not accidentally) to "What do you do?" I was ready. I gave my short speech on helping people work together better, then told him about the newsletter. I described it as a professional development newsletter with insights into personal and business development. Would he like to send him a free copy? "Of course!" came the reply and he gave me his e-mail address. I gave him my card, wished him a great day and the plane landed.

This is not an unusual story. In fact, it is not an isolated or singular one. This could be any one of at least fifteen conversations I've had in the last month on a flight. Odds are there are over twenty people reading this who think I am talking about them. I was on 22 airplanes in the month of September and when I wasn't seated alone, I was networking with my flying companions. I even did this with the bank officer on the phone that was refinancing my house. Turns out he is attending a presentation I am leading next Spring.

Here's how to be ready. Don't fear striking up a conversation. Ask the other person questions. Be interesting! Have a card or description ready for what you do. And give them something of value for having come in contact with you.

Avoid Most Networking Events: What? This is a networking column and you are telling me to *avoid* networking events? Yes, most "events" are populated by job seekers. They show up resume and business card in hand to meet someone looking to hire them. The problem is, most people who are hiring don't show up at Networking Events.

Very few people are hired at a networking event. As a result you have a bunch of individuals dishing out their personal sales pitch to other people doing the same. If you attend networking events to get someone's business, bad news: most of the people there are looking to get hired; not to sign your organization for a \$10,000 contract on their sales or product packaging.

So what do you do to network? Create your own network events. If you are always prepared (see last month's article) then everything you do becomes a networking event. Christmas parties, football games, church functions, elevator rides, waiting for table in a restaurant, airplane trips, etc. Be perpetually "on message" and use every opportunity to network.

Don't be obnoxious, but ask the right questions and people should be fascinated with what you do and how well you do it. You can create a networking environment by the way you leverage your personality in greeting and meeting other people wherever you are. You can turn any event into your own personal Networking Event.

Now some Networking Events are truly good for networking but in my experience, most aren't. Find out the sponsor, the attendees and the nature of the event before putting your time and efforts into going there. If it benefits you to go and get business, then by all means go. But if not, you can usually spend your time doing something more productive with much better results.

Here are some tips if you attend networking events to help you stand out from the crowd.

Handshake protocol: When wearing a name tag, wear it on your *right* lapel so it makes a straight line up your arm from your extended hand. Always stand when shaking hands. Face shoulder to shoulder and make eye contact with the other person. Refrain from making unnecessary gestures and extend your right hand (even if you are left handed). Keep your fingers straight and meet the other person's hand "web to web." It's not an arm wrestling match or a feats of strength competition so grip firmly but not too firm. State your name and look the person in the eye when you say it. Smile. Shake from elbow using two smooth pumps. Let go - no one likes a lingerer. Some tips for when you are introducing someone else.

- In business, the person of lesser authority is always introduced to the person of greater authority. The person with greater authority's name is always spoken first. "Mr./Mrs. Greater Authority, I would like to introduce Mr./Mrs. Lesser Authority." Try to refrain from saying, "my friend." Tell something about the person being introduced. Tell something about the person being introduced.
- A person of lesser authority does not give or ask for the business card of a person of greater authority. It must be offered. Look at the card when receiving it. It is an insult to the other person to just slip it into your pocket without looking at it first.

The Look of your Business Card:

- Make it interesting. Your card should be an attention grabber. Jeffrey Gitomer, the Sales Guru, says that when people see your card their first reaction should be "Wow!" It should stand out from all the others they see day-to-day. It should be one they recognize from a distance and want to see more of. Use a design that makes you stand out.

- Put multiple contact information on your card. If there are several ways to reach you (e-mail, local, toll-free, mailing address), include all of them. I've actually seen cards with the person's name misspelled. Regardless of what you think of e-mail there is no excuse to not have your e-mail, U.S. Mail and telephone number(s) on your card. List both local and toll-free numbers where you can be reached.
- It should be printed on thick card stock and pass the 4-Quarter Test (Thick enough to hold 4 quarters without bending). This says you spent enough money to make a great first impression--because it may be the only one you will get. Think of some of the flimsy cards you have received.
- Print something on the back. Have you ever noticed how many times you give someone your card and they turn it over to look at the back? This is advertising space that is being wasted if you don't use it. You already know people look back there.
- Use the back to tell something that is useful beyond the meeting. Place tips, information or advice that is practical on the back for people to use. I put tips about personalities and time management on the back of mine. (Yes I have several versions of my business card).
- If you can, diversify. Print several versions of your card for different target audiences. If you sell insurance and financial advice put insurance tips on some and investing tips on others. It won't cost that much more and it gives the card a life beyond the meeting. Wouldn't it be great if people were using your card as a reference guide? And showing it to others?
- Some people like to make their cards foldable. If this is you, fold it in the presence of the person you are giving it to. This will draw attention to the uniqueness of your card and they will be more likely to take notice of it.

Know how to work the room: First wear your name tag on your right chest or lapel, so eye contact with it flows up your arm as you shake hands. When arriving, first to the right out of the doorway. This lets others in and you can survey the people and the room set-up. Look around smiling and making eye contact with anyone looking your way. You are looking for the most influential people at the event.

A lot of times the underlings are sent to these local events because the company got a free ticket or it was their turn to represent the boss. If you are in Sales or Consulting or any business that depends on companies spending money on you. These aren't the people you are looking to network with. They may be nice and friendly but they aren't your target at this event. Only the influencers can spend the money on you. The others have to ask "Daddy's" permission. Target these influencers and plan what you will say. Make it interesting, not snappy. They deal with interesting people all day and avoid people trying to sell them something. Ask them about their business, their sales, their struggles, their successes. LISTEN.

What do you say after you have listened to your targeted "Influencer?"

Work on your introduction speech. Some people call this an "Elevator Speech," or a "20-Second Sell." This is a snappy statement that tells what you do. I don't always advise that

you tell what you do, though. I've had great responses just asking more questions about what I've heard the target person say. Use questions that probe and can't be answered with a "Yes" or "No." Get them talking more about their business, their struggles, what's keeping them up nights, what their challenges are, what the competition is doing to capitalize on their mistakes, what their customers are like, etc. Then offer to call or visit them tomorrow with some ideas to help them. Make the appointment *now*.

If you do give your "Elevator Speech" make it short and one that makes the person ask, "How do you do that?" If they ask, make them ask another question with your next statement. Keep them curious as to how you will accomplish what you do for them. If you don't, you are wasting their (and your) time. Then follow up immediately. Don't allow them time to forget who you are when you call. Someone else may be taking their business from you. It's not important what you do, it's what *you do for them* that matters. Otherwise, who cares?

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