

Networking: The Who, What, When, Where, Why and How

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Who:

Anyone can benefit from learning to network and there is no age too young to begin to learn.

What:

Definition of a network from Wikipedia is any interconnected group or system. More specifically, a network is any method of sharing information between two systems (human or mechanical). Obviously we are here today to talk about human networks.

My definition of networking is a little different. It is the building of a group of relationships in which the you can **provide assistance of some type** to another individual **without the expectation of anything immediately in return**.

When & Where:

While you can pretty much network at anytime and anywhere, you need to use some discretion in your efforts. It may not be appropriate to get too involved in networking for instance at a funeral.

Why:

The reason to network will vary from time to time and from person to person. For some it may be to grow a business endeavor, find a new job, maybe a new golf or bridge partner or perhaps even a spouse. The overall intent though should be to make the connections for the future. It may even be for something that you have no current idea that you will need the connection for.

How:

Probably the most common place to network would be through something like a Chamber luncheon, after hour mixer, ribbon cutting or business expo. In addition you may look for even more formal venues such as a formal networking group like the Chamber leads group, a BNI group or other similar group.

To be successful in your networking efforts you should have a plan for the event that you are attending. It may be to meet someone in a specific business or to make just a certain number of contacts. But have a reasonable goal or plan for

yourself. It should not be just an attempt to exchange as many business cards as possible.

Your preparation for attending the event should include having a nametag. Most experts suggest that you wear the nametag on your right. This allows it to be readily seen when you shake hands as the other person. I have found a great website that offers more free information on nametags and networking than any other site I have seen to date. The site is www.hellomynameisscott.com. He suggests that all you use on your nametag is your first name. No business name or occupation. I have tried this recently I have great success in opening conversations this way.

An easy way to begin, especially if you are new to networking is to approach someone standing alone and perhaps off to one corner. You can open a friendly conversation by asking a simple question or making a comment. While it sounds a little corny it could be just a comment about the weather. Or you might even ask if they attend this type of event often. Once a conversation is begun, you can then turn to asking what they do and perhaps exchange business cards. While you want to be polite and courteous, you are not required to just exchange cards if you do not feel that they fit into your goals for the event.

If you do exchange cards, you may want to make a note on the back as to anything you may have agreed to such as a meeting or something you were to get to them. It is considered polite to ask first if they mind if you make a note on the back. This is extremely important if you do business in an international environment as in some cultures it is considered very disrespectful to write on a card. When you do exchange cards be sure to hand it with the print facing the person you are giving it to. Generally you will not want to spend more than about 5 minutes with an individual so that you are able to meet several people at the event. One way to move on is to introduce them to someone else.

As soon as possible after the event, you will want to make any additional notes about your contact as well as when and where you met the person. I prefer not to keep the card itself but to enter the information into a database for future reference. I use ACT but there are several other software programs available or you could even use an Excel spreadsheet. I prefer the use of the computer as it takes the burden off of having to figure out the best way to file business cards and also having to remember a lot of information. You can search in so many ways that it makes things much more efficient.

The next thing you will want to do is have some sort of follow up with your new contact. You can send a note or have a get together (one on one meeting) or even both.

What is a one on one meeting? A one on one meeting is a time to get together with someone you want to connect with and get to know them better. It is not a

time to try to sell each other. Take time to find out about them such as family, hobbies, share business & personal successes, etc. It may be as short as 20 minutes or as long as a couple of hours. It may be over a quick cup of coffee or on the golf course. The idea is to build a relationship and to find ways that you may assist the other person in building their business. Remember, it is about them, not you. And people like to do business with or refer to people they know, like and trust. That is what you are trying to accomplish is to give the other person that opportunity.

In addition to learning about them personally and professionally a few other questions you may want to ask are:

What do you do?

How did you get started in your business?

What do you enjoy most about your profession?

What trends do you see coming?

What ways have you found most effective in promoting your business?

How can I know if somebody I am talking to would be a good prospect for you?

What next:

After your meeting be sure to follow up with a personal handwritten note of thank you. This can be one of your best relationship builders. Not many people today take the time to send a handwritten note any more. This will help separate you from the crowd. An additional step I like to take is to have a follow up meeting a few weeks down the road. Take a few minutes to reconnect, get to know them better and follow up on something that came up on your original meeting.

All this takes time but it will pay off. It makes your work and life much easier in the end.

Resource List

Websites:

www.hellomynameisscott.com

www.fripp.com

www.theconnectionqueen.com

www.eyeonsales.com

Books:

Dig Your Well Before You Are Thirsty by *Harvey Mackay*

Power Networking by *Donna Fisher and Sandy Vilas*

Cracking The Networking Code by *Dean Lindsey*

Endless Referrals by *Bob Burg*

The Go-Giver by *Bob Burg & John David Mann*

The World's Best Known Marketing Secret by *Ivan Misner & Virginia Devine*

Prospect Factory by *Ted Stevenot*