

Networking

Everyone talks about “networking.” However what exactly is networking? Obviously, it is about meeting and interacting with people, but how well you define it and plan your subsequent strategy will go a long ways towards determining if your networking is fruitful. Networking should always be a means to the end of reaching your target market. Since it is said that only six “degrees of separation” exist between you and any other person, the enormous potential is apparent.

You must network with people who: a) are a member of your target market group or b) will lead you closer towards an eventual meeting with your prospect. This is at a minimum. However, you might join clubs such as your local Chamber of Commerce that openly sponsor networking events to hone your networking skills. Once you have gotten comfortable in networking situations, you can narrow your focus to specific groups that are attended by your direct target.

Developing your skills does take some practice. The following statements are some networking “Do’s” and “Don’ts” that will help you to hone those skills:

DO

- **Make friends.** Take it easy and learn about the person. Establish a common ground. Ask them about family, children, hobbies, etc. Once you have a common ground, a natural conversation can take place.
- **Be present.** No matter who you are talking to – pay attention! Everyone can help you in some way. Don’t look around for better “prospects”. If you want to move on, you will find a natural break in the conversation, or you can excuse yourself to refill your drink or use the restroom at any time, while ending on a good note.
- **Be general.** Once you have gotten to a discussion on their specific business, refer to ways to help them in general terms. For example, “Many business owners...” or “In that industry I have noticed...”
- **Build your relationships.** Every time you see someone that you have talked with before, you have the opportunity to advance the relationship. A networking event is not a cold call, so don’t try to close on the first stop.
- **Give.** If you have other relationships that may help the person that you are talking to, ask them if they would be interested in talking to them! Helping people goes a lot farther than a pitch.
- **Get their information.** Get a business card, and enter it immediately into your Outlook folder when you return to the office, including any details that you have learned. This will help you remember their name, as well as give you a database of names that you can link together in the future.
- **Take notes.** Use the back of the business card that they gave you to jot a few notes like “lunch” or “knows Cindy”.
- **Set Goals.** You might set goals for talking with a specific person, the numbers of cards collected, follow up calls scheduled or lunch appointments set up.

- **Have fun.** If you weren't at the event, you wouldn't meet anyone... so have fun! People like to meet people who are having a good time.
- **Have an elevator speech prepared.** You need to be able to answer the question of "what do you do?" in a quick, easy, customer-focused and effective 30 second period. "I'm an accountant" gives them the opportunity to label you as every other accountant that they have ever met.
- **Contact them.** Once you have gotten back to the office, and have entered their information into your Outlook (or similar) program, call them or send a note.

DON'T

- **Sell your product or service the first time you meet someone.** If you come on too strong or launch into a sales pitch, you will not only be ineffective – but unwelcome.
- **Be shy.** Everyone in the room is there to network in most cases. Say "hello", meet people and make some new acquaintances.
- **Remain stagnant with those you have met before.** Once you have gotten to know them, you can advance the relationship to a formal luncheon, where you "can learn more about each others' businesses."
- **Be desperate.** You must approach all situations at a level at least equal to the person across from you. Therefore, if you feel that you NEED to close a sale, others will sense it and look for an exit. Change your paradigm to meeting people.
- **Get too comfortable.** You are there to meet as many new people as you have set goals for. Don't meet a friend and simply enjoy the food.

Following the fundamentals of good and bad networking skills, the basic steps that you must take before beginning your network marketing is to determine where you will network, and to prepare your "30-Second Commercial/Elevator Pitch."

The next step is to list all area networking groups that you might attend. Be sure to list general events (such as the Chamber) and target-specific events (such as the National Association of the Remodeling Industry). Also be sure to investigate any tip clubs in your area, such as BNI, LeTip, and Chamber associated tip clubs. These are groups that meet for the specific purpose of passing leads and are very effective. Other examples are Alumni Clubs, industry associations, social clubs, hobby clubs, etc.

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Next, list any possible strategic alliances that you may form to expand your network. Examples such as: professionals in complementary businesses, lawyers, accountants, real estate agents, business brokers, bankers, chamber representatives, etc.

Next – prepare your 30 second commercial. Again, this should be a short statement of what you do, and the benefits that your customer receives. Look over your benefits workpaper for ideas.
