

Business 101: Tips For Successful Business Networking

Effective business networking is the linking together of individuals who, through trust and relationship building, become walking, talking advertisements for one another.



1) Be Genuine

Too many times we are compelled to make a great first impression so we put on a show and act like we are someone we are not. Or... We huddle together with our friend(s) by the bar and speak to no one. Keep in mind that networking is about being authentic, building trust and relationships, and seeing how you can help others.

2) Establish Goals

How many times do you see people wondering around aimlessly at a networking event? Are they just there to pass the time? It seems as if so many of us are just trying to “survive” it. Ask yourself what your goals are in participating in networking meetings so that you will pick groups that will help you get what you are looking for. Some meetings are based more on learning, making contacts, and/or volunteering rather than on strictly making business connections.

3) Make the Rounds

Have you ever joined a club only to find out later that your goals are not the same? What happens more often than not is we simply stop attending. Visit as many groups as possible that spark your interest. Notice the tone and attitude of the group. Do the people sound supportive of one another? Does the leadership appear competent? Many groups will allow you to visit two or more times before joining.

4) Get Involved

Hold volunteer positions in organizations. This is a great way to stay visible and give back to groups that have helped you. Please note that if you don't have time in your schedule to do some extra things for your group, you may want to consider not getting involved at all. There is only one thing worse than not joining a group – and that's being a member that never raises their hand when volunteers are asked for. What message do you think that sends the other members of the group?

5) Ask Real Questions

Ask open-ended questions in networking conversations. This means questions that ask who, what, where, when, and how as opposed to those that can be answered with a simple yes or no. This form of questioning opens up the discussion and shows listeners that you are interested in them. Part of being an effective communicator is being a good interviewer. Watch any late night talk show and you soon see that the interviewer almost never asks a question that can simply be answered with a “yes” or a “no”.

6) Position Yourself

Become known as a powerful resource for others. When you are known as a strong resource, people remember to turn to you for suggestions, ideas, names of other people,

etc. This keeps you visible to them. This is the most important tip to becoming a great networker but it's also the hardest to explain. You either know how to do it or you don't. Here are some tips:

- Learn some tricks for remembering names. Remembering names is crucial.
- Offer your expertise or the services of your company when the group needs it. Offer it for free when you can.
- Get to know what everyone in the group does. Get to know all of them individually and who they work for. That way you can recommend them when someone is in need.
- Don't ever recommend someone you know who does not do good work. You risk damaging your own reputation.

7) It's About You, Not Your Company

When someone asks you questions at a networking event, the answers usually sound like an advertisement for the company you work for. What the company does, where they are located, who they serve, what they charge, etc. Working for a good company is one thing, but it's more important to have a clear understanding of what you do, for whom, and what makes you different from others doing the same thing. Your company probably sent you to a networking event because they thought you'd make a good ambassador for the company, not a walking billboard. In order to get referrals, you must first have a clear understanding of what you do that you can easily articulate to others.

8) Ask for Help

Be able to articulate what you are looking for and how others may help you. Too often people in conversations ask, "How may I help you?" and no immediate answer comes to mind. Follow through quickly and efficiently on referrals you are given. When people give you referrals, your actions are a reflection on them. Respect and honour that and your referrals will grow.

9) Follow up

Call those you meet who may benefit from what you do and vice versa. Express that you enjoyed meeting them, and ask if you could get together and share ideas.

10) Overdress

When attending a networking function try to dress a notch above what you think everyone else will be wearing. Many times when there are negotiations taking place. The best dressed person has a subliminal advantage. It's always better to show up overdressed than under dressed.

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