



Realizing Profitable Potential through Change

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## Networking

What is the best way to build our business? Referrals and Networking! Referrals from existing customers are the best way to grow a business. Networking is a close second. Personal interaction is more powerful than any type of radio, print or television advertising you can do. So why is it so often overlooked? Most of the time it is because networking makes us step outside of our comfort zone and we don't really understand the networking concept.

### **Some of the biggest mistakes we make when joining networking groups are:**

1. We join a group but we don't go. Then we wonder why the groups don't help us? Networking doesn't just happen by adding our name to a list. People need to meet us and build a relationship with us before they'll do business or refer us.
2. We appear at events, but we don't interact with anyone while we are there. Networking involves interaction with others! No one can build a relationship without interaction...talking is what networking is all about. We need to watch television or read the newspaper before we go to events so that we are up to date on the latest events. This helps break the ice!
3. We skip the networking portion of the meeting, arriving just in time for the meal, and duck out just as the speaker is finishing up. Food is great; however, that is not the purpose of networking events. Food is the least important...we can swing through the drive through on the way back to work if we need to. We need to set a goal for number of quality contacts before we attend a networking event. Afterwards we'll be able to see if we achieved our goal. Having a goal gives us extra incentive to step outside of our comfort zone.
4. We talk and sit with people we already know. It's always nice to catch up with old friends; however, there is a time for socializing and a time for networking. Schedule a lunch for socializing with a close friend, but don't use valuable networking time to catch up on each other's families. Again, setting a goal helps us move about and network with new people!

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5. We make no effort to be visible; instead, we try to blend into the crowd. If we don't stand out, others will never notice us. One of the most creative ways to do this is to wear a favorite hat or outfit that helps us stand out. We need to find a creative way to help people remember us. One example is a businesswoman who always wears colorful and exotic hats. People may not remember her name, but when she does her follow-up calls and makes a comment about her hat...they always remember the hat! How can we be creative?

6. We wait for others to make the first move. Why wait? They are waiting for us. We need to step outside of our comfort zone and make a great first impression! Business does not fall in our lap. We have to be willing to sell our business and be interested in other's success. The most important part of that is setting a great first impression and showing we care!

7. We think handing out business cards is networking. We should value our business cards and not hand them out to everyone. This leads to thoughts that we are drumming up business. Let them think we don't need the business and that our card is of value!

8. We give up too soon on a group and move on to another one. We never give ourselves or others time to establish relationships. Relationships don't happen overnight and we need to be willing to take the time to build them instead of jumping from group to group. It is better to have one great contact than ten poor contacts. When we set our goals for networking events, make sure we are focusing on the quantitative and qualitative aspects. Quality counts!

9. We have "Nice weather" or "Hi, how are you?" conversations instead of productive conversations. Ask them how business is going or what is their ideal customer. What can we do to help them grow their business? Small talk doesn't do much for building relationships. Ask them how we can help them. That will get them talking and what a great way to build a relationship by showing we care about their business.

10. We arrive without any idea of what we have to give up or what we want to get. We need to know what assistance we are wanting from others and what we can provide them. Who do we know in various industries? It is a give-and-take relationship. We should give more than we take. It's called the "Giver's Gain" concept...we gain more in business by giving!

11. We violate "good networking" protocols.

- a. We should be listening more than we are talking. We should not talk about what your business has to offer unless asked. It is okay to share knowledge, but do it as a way of sharing information...not selling our services. Ask others how we can help them grow their business.
- b. Don't consume anyone's time the whole event. These interactions should be short introductions of no more than 5 minutes. It is important to follow-up after the event. The follow-up provides us an opportunity to explore mutual opportunities in further detail.
- c. Poor introductions reflect poorly on the introducer and the person they are introducing. Have a powerful introduction that sets the setting for further conversation.

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i "Hi! This is Pam and she does consulting."

ii. "Hello! How are you? Jaymi, I'd like to introduce you to Susan. Susan eases the pain for her customers through small business training and consulting services in the areas of accounting, human resource and management."

iii. "Hi Kari! I'd like to introduce you to Kate. Kate enhances the beauty of everyone she meets. She is a Mary Kay consultant and she can add beauty to your life."

Now which of these is more powerful? The second two are definitely more powerful than the first. They set the tone and tell more about what the person does. This helps create interest and provides a starting point for the individuals to build upon.

Networking is not difficult, but it does take practice. We are all at ease within our comfort zones, but it is time to break out and challenge ourselves to be more successful and realize our true potential. What are you going to change today?

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