

Networking is a life skill not a sales technique

“The need to seek and maintain interpersonal relationships is a basic need of all human beings. That is why the need to affiliate with others and to be accepted by them is as basic to our psychological well-being as hunger and thirst are to our physical satisfaction” (Courtney Lindsay, Sciences 360).

For many of us the idea of walking into a room full of strangers fills us with dread – we’d rather stick pins in our eyes! Then add the expectation to successfully secure new clients or business contacts, networking fast becomes top of the most dreaded list of things to do. But it doesn’t have to.

As we embrace the digital world the importance of making connections face to face and building relationships is even greater. In both our personal and business lives a good network is vital to our success and happiness and now it’s as important to a prospective employer as the right skills and experience. Networking is a good and necessary part of modern life.

So how do we make it easier?

Approach it with a different mind-set. Attending a networking event with the idea that you are going to make appointments and sell your products and services is completely unrealistic, and with that attitude you will quickly become the person nobody wants to talk to! Taking away the pressure of making a sale will make a big difference to how you feel. Instead think about the event as:

- A powerful professional development experience
- An opportunity to test your ideas, hone your ability to communicate and improve your executive presence
- A fun and informal focus group – great for sharing ideas and gaining inspiration
- A discovery platform and a great way to give your personal brand more exposure.

Have realistic expectations. If things go well at a networking event you will chat to a few people, hopefully make some connections and exchange business cards. If that happens then the event is a success. A promise to keep in touch or link on LinkedIn will ensure the connection has a chance to grow.

But turning a connection into a relationship takes time - keep your promise and keep in touch. Share interesting articles and pieces of information and over time a connection may turn into a personal or business opportunity. Give it time, don't expect anything right away.

Don't be choosy. When you approach others at a networking event think about them, ask questions, listen and be genuinely interested in them. Don't look around hoping to find 'someone better'.

No connection is a bad connection, so even if you somebody doesn't seem to be the 'right' fit for you or your business right now, you don't know who they know or what they may do in the future.

So start networking, enjoy it and don't forget your business cards!

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