

Networking Your Way to the Sixth Degree

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How much networking should the people in my company be doing? And where should we be doing it? To be honest, we don't do much networking, and I wonder if we're missing out on opportunities because of it.

Doing business is all about connections, and networking is one way to connect. Use networking to extend your reach. 6 degrees of separation is true! Networking is one way to jump start the process of getting from first to sixth degree.

There are some things you want to keep in mind when networking, to improve your effectiveness: expand the venues in which you network, be memorable when you're out there, be specific about what you're looking to accomplish. Be a connector yourself. Be open to possibilities, and don't be afraid to ask for help.

Join at least one business organization with a diverse mix. Hang out somewhere other than your local trade organization. Use networking to increase your chances of meeting people who call on, know socially, or otherwise may be connected with people you want to meet.

Set a personal goal to attend at least one to two networking events / month. And ask your sales, marketing and management staff to do the same. Don't all go to the same

events, but rather spread out, to increase the number of places you get to.

When you go, plan to be memorable. Wear attire that is appropriate to the event, but also notable – such as a bright tie or scarf. Try out different “elevator speeches” until you find something that people connect to, and then stick with it. What's an “elevator speech”? It's a brief description of, or “speech” about, who you are, and what your company stands for. It's known as “elevator” because it's short enough that you could say it in less time that it would take you to go a few floors on an elevator.

Show genuine interest in the people you're meeting. Have a set of questions to ask, if you're afraid of not being sure what to say. Ask people to tell you about themselves, what they do, what they find most interesting, what are their hobbies, who else they know. Carefully listen as people tell you about themselves. Try to figure out what connections you have in common, that you both can build on.

Offer to introduce people. One of the best ways to be remembered is as a connector. People generally remember who connected them. And as their circle of connections expands, your circle expands as well.

Be clear and specific about what you're looking for. If you want

introductions to certain positions, or industries, say so. Don't give up, just because the person you're talking to can't help you directly. Explore who else they know; sooner or later someone will know someone who can help you get where you want to go.

Gather cards at an event. As you get each card, make a few quick notes on the back: initials of the event, date, something memorable about the person, who they can connect you to, who they are looking to be connected to. Don't expect that you'll remember it all the next day. If you're doing your job networking, you're going to meet a lot of people, and it should be hard to remember everyone without a few hints. Go ahead and take notes. The person you're talking to will probably be impressed that you care enough about the conversation to write down some things.

Be prepared to follow up after an event. Email is fastest. Include a reminder about where you met, and how you can both help each other through further introductions. Refer to the notes on the business card, to give the email maximum impact.

Think that networking could be a lot of work? Consider the alternatives. You could stay home and make 200 cold calls, hoping to connect with a few people who might or might not be interested. Or, you can spend an hour or two



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at a networking event and meet a group of people who might know how to get you in front of exactly the people you want to meet.

If you find yourself getting less than you expected from networking, look at what's working, and not working. Are you hiding out on the fringes, or are you in the middle of the action? Are you clear about what you're looking for? Do you have a way of being memorable? Are you offering to help others make connections? Get out there and make things happen for yourself, by making things happen for other people. I assure you it will come back in multiples.

Looking for a good book? Try, *The Networking Survival Guide: Get the Success You Want By Tapping Into The People You Know*, by Diane Darling.

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