

Get the Most Out of Networking

Networking is the maintenance and development of mutual and beneficial relationships. Most people network to develop their business, share information or to help other people. What most people do not realize is that the networking process takes patience, organization and a good attitude. With a proper networking plan, you can change the way you deal with, obtain and maintain your business relationships.

Three things to keep in mind when you develop your networking plan are that networking is:

1. Sharing information – your information is a valuable resource to other people
2. A skill – it takes time to develop
3. Helping others – you need to help others to get what you want

At the beginning of every month, organize your networking plan. Answering these questions will help you develop your plan:

1. What special events are coming up this month that I should attend?
2. In what groups do I want to be involved?
3. Are there membership meetings for the groups that I choose?
4. Who can I meet with for coffee to share ideas?
5. What resources or contacts could I share with my networking community?
6. Whom have I not spoken to in a while?
7. Out of the people that I have met, who could I introduce to each other that would be mutually beneficial?

After you have answered these questions, the next step is to set up your calendar. Remember to set the time to go early and to stay late at meetings and conferences. This is the best time to make your networking connections. While you are at these events, it is important to remember your role as a resource. Bring material with you that may benefit other people that you are meeting. Prepare yourself with open-ended questions that are relevant to the event.

Have a custom nametag, so you don't have to wear a sticky "My name is" tag—it will help promote your business. Prepare a short story (some call this your "elevator speech") about yourself and what your business does. People enjoy stories and tend to remember them over facts and ideas.

Networking typically does not boost your business immediately. There is a process that goes beyond the networking event: *follow-up*. Whether you follow-up the event by emails or calls – you need to follow-up. Some people collect business cards from networking, but do not establish a continued relationship with these contacts. After the event, (on the back of their business card) jot down when and where you met the person, and include a few facts you remember from your conversation. These connections should not be put by the wayside, but have immediate follow-up before the event is a distant memory.

Understanding, planning and following-up your networking activities is crucial to your impact on your business. Networking can create sales and resources if you plan and remember your role.