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## BUSINESS NETWORKING AND MARKETING UPS AND DOWNS

The last couple of days have been beautiful, the weather near perfect and some of us are suffering from spring fever while others are simply struggling with the pollen levels. This time of the year reminds me that summer is coming and things are about to slow down – in networking. I would like to take just a moment and discuss this trend and what I believe may be the cause of it.

Let's begin in the fall. At this time of the year we are working feverishly trying to procure new business because we realize that around the holidays things will slow down. As December draws near, some of us become preoccupied with things like parties and shopping and our attention turns from building our business. Others find it increasingly difficult to make contact as people begin long vacations.

Then the holidays pass. We put our marketing and networking efforts into high gear, going to several meetings a week, trying to get things cranked up again. The result is increased business and increased profits. Have you ever noticed that in the early part of February that things begin to pick up almost at a maddening pace? When this occurs, unless we are prepared for growth, we start to back off on our promotions as we scramble to complete the work that has been generated by our marketing efforts.

In effect, we stop networking. We lose contact with those we have been making and asking for referrals, and they begin to feel as if we are not interested in them any longer. When this happens, they may look for someone else to refer when that target prospect comes along.

By early to mid summer, we are starting to crawl out from under the workload and we again look for opportunities. Unfortunately, the vacations have started again as children are released from school for the summer. Thus it is very difficult once again to find the contacts that were out there just before our business picked up again late last winter.

By mid August, school is back in session and people are coming back out into the networking world again. Of course we are seeing some of the same people that were there before, but there are also a lot of new faces as well. Because we had slacked off from our promotion efforts, we were not there to greet the new faces as they started their new business. So the people who have a balanced networking and marketing strategy are there to greet them.

These are the people who have businesses that seem to be growing. They have a marketing and networking plan that is consistent year round. When many businesses are experiencing that new business rush in the spring, these business owners are ready to absorb the new business with new employees or temporary help. They realize that to maintain growth means to be ready for any upswing in the economy that could propel their business to the next level.

So how do we accomplish this? First plan for growth. Have a system ready for when you have more business than you can handle so that there is help you can call. This is managed by building relationships with temp agencies, headhunters, and placement firms. Hire people on a contractor basis if necessary. This saves money on benefits and salaries when things are a bit slower. It also reduces the amount of paperwork when it comes to payroll processing and taxes.

Next, develop a plan for networking that is manageable. Set a goal for the amount of meetings that you would attend when business is just OK and stick to it when business gets better. Attend functions year round, even during the holiday seasons.

Plan vacations when necessary, but don't assume that everyone is going on vacation simply because it is summer. Most people have to accommodate the schedules of others and entire companies usually do not go on vacation at the same time. Notice that larger corporations always have staff on hand to do business while an employee is on vacation. Also take note that large corporations do not stop promoting just because it is the month of July or December. They are consistent year round.

The lesson here is that, if you want to grow into a large company, take a look at what large companies do. Emulate them if they are successful and you may be able to duplicate their success. You must be constantly marketing, networking and promoting to ensure consistent business year round. If you decide to slack off now because business is good, I guarantee that when autumn comes you will be working twice as hard to get things going again. If, on the other hand, you keep on consistently marketing the way you did when times were slow, you should be able to experience the growth of both your company and your bank account during the entire year.

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