



NETWORKING IS MORE THAN JUST HANDING OUT BUSINESS CARDS

At a Chamber of Commerce Business Card Exchange several years ago a well-dress woman walked up to me, business card in hand and, in perfect form held it in both hands in front of me, gesturing for me to take it. I took the card from her and smiled. She looked up and in a polite voice, said "Thank you," and walked away. How sad. Here was this obviously well-intentioned woman, who most likely owned an interesting business but never learned what to do at a card exchange. Somewhere she bought into the idea that you were suppose to hand out as many business cards in as little time as possible. Clearly, this does nothing but waste business cards. Great for card businesses, not so great for yours. The other extreme is the person who spends the entire time at a card exchange talking to the same individual, sometimes even people from their own company. Again, this is quite unproductive. The purpose of a business card exchange is to get to meet new people in a pleasant atmosphere. While there are many good books to help you hone your networking skills including, Sue Roane's How to Work a Room, the essence of networking is quite simple. Businesses run on relationships. I've always felt that everything that we do is about personal relationships and a business just gives us a playing field on which to do it. Following that theme, growing your business is about developing and nurturing relationships and card exchanges and similar networking events are really the starting point to begin what will hopefully become a mutually rewarding relationship. Since your time is limited, it is a good idea to spend only a short time speaking with people, especially those you already know. If you feel a resonance with someone you're talking with, make arrangements to follow-up your connection at a later date and move on to meet someone else. I'm sure the shy looking person in the corner, who is probably there for the very first time, has something interesting to say. Why not go over and extend your hand. The other big faux pas I see over and over again, are the people who approach the networking meeting with a "me, me, me" attitude. A better approach is to learn about the other person first. You then have the option of explaining how what you do might be of interest to them. This establishes a stronger platform for communications, for as speaking legend Zig Zigler says, "You get what you want by helping other people get what they want." Care about the other person There are better ways to network and meet prospective business contacts. For openers, (no pun intended) people are more responsive if you first show some interest in them and what they do. There is an old cliché that says we have one mouth and two ears for a reason. If you listen more than you talk, you will automatically find people more interested in talking with you and being around you. Marketing guru, Jay Abraham, once said that "Discovery is the fuel of competitive advantage." Get curious. Become interested in other people and what makes them tick. Really care about the other person. If you take the time to investigate, you will find that even those people who appear quite ordinary have a story to tell. If you show an interest in them and their lives, you will not only increase your chances of doing business with them but you may gain a friend as well. How do you do that? When you do introduce yourself, do so in a way that states the benefit of doing business with you. Saying "Hi, my name is Mary and I sell insurance" is not very exciting. However, if you were to say, "My name is Mary and I help people prepare for the uncertainty that may be in their future." This causes the other person, if they are at all curious, to ask, "How do you do that?" At this point, you have opened the door for a further explanation or "commercial" for your business. You can go on to explain the benefits of your products and services. As an exercise, devise three or four ways to introduce your business. Let each one focus on a different benefit of your product or service. Test each of them at your next networking event. Remember: people do not buy products or services, they buy benefits and solutions. The more you focus on communicating the benefits gained from using your products or services, the more you will benefit from the increase in business. With prospecting new business becoming more and more difficult, a personal relationship is even more important and the Chamber of Commerce Card Exchange offers the perfect playground for you to do it, besides the food is usually pretty good too.

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