

10 TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL NETWORKING

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1. Recognise the importance of networking

Ask any successful business person and they will tell you that above all else networking skills are absolutely vital to grow your business. Networking can increase your market share, help you gain new ideas, provide work and perspectives on life and business. Speaking to one person can potentially give you access to over 200 clients and suppliers.

2. Aim to become visible

You need to let others know you exist and what you do by becoming highly visible and being set apart from the crowd, which is what good networking skills can provide. Be seen and get known. Look for interesting events to go to; clubs, associations, meetings, seminars, conferences, presentations, breakfast briefings, lunches, or start your own networking club.

3. Take care of your image

To have success in networking you need to maintain your self-esteem and build your confidence. Consider how you dress, speak and maintain your body language; aim to present a professional, positive image.

4. Always be positive

By having an open “can do” attitude and having the belief in giving and sharing as well as offering assistance your reputation will soon grow.

5. Treat all events as networking

Going into a specific networking event you may experience fear and trepidation but there is also the thrill and challenge of who potentially you might meet. However we all have all sorts of events we attend which are in effect networking ie meeting people to build mutually beneficial relationships. The networks we belong to can include schools, colleges, work, social life, small businesses, corporate businesses, family, neighbours, advisors or the church.

6. Build your relationships

You need to project an excellent image of warmth, approachability, understanding, knowledge, empathy, and an ability to engage with anyone.. Don't forget your most powerful contact might not be the most useful to you. Above all be genuine. You should take an interest in everyone you meet, remember their name, listen acutely to them to understand their needs and how you could assist each other. Tact, reassurance and the building of trust are also the hallmarks and vital components of relationship building. Be relaxed and stay interesting.

7. Develop the ability to “small talk”

Being able to talk to anyone about anything is a valuable skill in its own right and essential in networking. Being able to initiate a conversation means you are more likely come into contact with people who may well turn out to be invaluable contacts. Small talk can be difficult but have a few stock phrases up your sleeve such as “How did you get started in.....?”, “What do you particularly need to succeed?” “Where are you going with it next.....?”

8. Develop active listening skills

Networking is not about selling it is about listening to the other person and showing them you are interested in them by active listening. Allow others to open up & talk freely. Give you're your undivided attention even if it is only for five minutes. Take an interest in what's said and acknowledge this by nodding or agreeing. Use positive body language such as facing them with lots of eye contact. Used subtle mirroring techniques (body language copying) to develop rapport.

9. Use your business card

With the many people you meet this is the only way to maintain the initial contact. 90% of businesses have no card and only 25% have a card that is up to date and informative. At the very least your own should have on it your name, address and phone number and ideally your email address if not your website. Try to include on the back your skills focus to help others identify what you have to offer. You should also create a tracking system to identify and remember all those who you meet.

10. Be organised

Keep a written list of everyone you know and everyone you meet and what they do or keep a database. Write memory joggers on the back of business cards. You may find it useful to keep a diary of who you meet and where and any mutual contacts for future reference.

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