

HOW TO DEVELOP YOUR NETWORKING SKILLS

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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, work and perspectives on life and business. Speaking to one person can potentially give you access to over 200 clients and suppliers.

You need to let others know you exist 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.

Where to start

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. 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.

Relationship building

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.

Create 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.....?”

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.

Successful networking tips

Finally, to develop successful networking skills, listen first, encourage others to talk, be personable, professional and persistent.

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