

Networking Rules!

Things to do...

1. Arrive early

In my experience I have found that if I arrive to Networking functions around 15 minutes early I am greeted by the organisers and that breaks the ice for me. I then stand close to the door and greet people as they come in. They think I am one of the organisers and speak to me easily and freely.

2. Grab the best seat

I will go and pick the best seat to see and hear the guest speaker. I figure if I do not meet anyone of interest I am still getting my money's worth. However, in all the years that I have been networking I have never been to an event where I did not pick up at least one business card and spoke to at least one interesting person.

3. Approach those standing on their own

If I see someone standing on their own they are usually in the same boat as us and do not know anyone there. I will approach them just say hello and then the conversation develops from there. They are relieved they have someone to talk to and both of you now look like you belong.

4. Make an effort to meet the Guest Speaker

I have had a chat with some amazing people over the years such as Tom Peters, Bob Dwyer, Jonah Lomu, Joe Bugner, Stephen Lundin, Kim Beazley, Pauline Hanson, and Robyn Henderson. You often gain a nugget of wisdom that was not in the presentation and it is great for name-dropping. "I had lunch with Kim Beazley last week." You do not have to tell them that it was with 300 other people.

5. Aim to meet two people only

Many new Networkers make the mistake of trying to get their business card out to too many people as possible at a Networking event. Networking is about quality not quantity. Most of those cards will end up in the bin. If I meet two people and they give me their business cards I am more than happy and see it as a positive result. Sometimes I will meet some one who is definitely not my cup of tea. However, I have learned that I may have something to teach this person or they have something to teach me. I pay them 110% attention and listen to



what they have to say. I may not end up doing any business with them but they often refer other people to me.

6. Be Consistent

The most successful Networkers consistently attend the same events each month. This gives them creditability with other Networkers and soon you become part of the furniture and other people will introduce you to their guests. At the Australian Institute of Credit Management, AICM, which I have been attending for the past nine years nearly every member in Queensland knows me or as heard of me. I am very fortunate to get a lot of business from that association and am very comfortable there. It is like visiting a group of wonderful friends every month. I still remember the first meeting I attended. A friend invited me and I was somewhat daunted by the calibre of the aged members and was petrified. It took me another year and in another state to attend another meeting. Now I scare new members!

7. Be memorable

The issue with many Networking functions is there is usually more than one person from each profession there. For example, the AICM focus nights I attend usually have four recruitment companies, three solicitors and four debt collection agencies being represented. They may have as many as three staff each there and sometimes the suppliers and sponsors out numbered the Credit Managers.

It is important that you stand out amongst your competition and that you represent yourself rather than your company. I have several competitors vying for some of my customers and I welcome them with open arms. It keeps me on my toes and ensures I look after my clients as much as possible.

The relationship I have with my clients is strong enough and most competitors treat me with respect being the "Elder" in the Credit industry. When I first attended credit Focus nights as a recruiter I was the only recruiter in Brisbane aside from the owner of the recruitment company I worked for who had credit and collection experience. That made me memorable immediately.

8. Be of Service

Networking is about serving others. It is the one quality that determines the difference between a good Networker and a great Networker. Those that approach networking as a way simply to sell their goods and services for purely their own gain will only be successful in the short term until the industry or that Networking group find out what they are really like.

Great Networkers start thinking about a person they have just met and whom they can link them up with so that they can successfully do business together.

“Ask not what they can do for your business but ask what can you do for their business.”

9. Be the Knowledge Expert

In continuing with the philosophy of being of service one of the easiest ways to become well known and valued to customers, suppliers, and potential customers is to be a knowledge expert.

When you hear an issue it may not be in your area of expertise but the important thing is that you know where to find that knowledge and pass on those details to your customer to make life easier for them and solve their issues. For example, if you needed a good solicitor, accountant, bookkeeper, industrial relations specialist, car finder, cleaner, trainer, Speaker and even a marriage celebrant I would be able to refer you to someone immediately. Because many people know that I network constantly I get called for all sorts of information that does not relate to training or recruitment. In fact, I have been called a walking Yellow Pages.

10. Smile

The most important tool in your networking kit is your smile. When you first greet people, smile. That breaks the ice and nine times out of 10 the person will smile back and greet you. On the rare occasion where a person does not smile back it is usually because they are under some kind of duress and it is their problem so do not take it personally.

One of the reasons I love living in Brisbane is I can still walk down Queen Street mall and smile at everyone that passes me. I get lots of smiles and greetings back. Ok, some people do think I am crazy!