

The Business Connector

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Networking Smarter

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Whether we know it or not, it has been the mantra of the human race since even before we first stood upright and walked: “We need to find a better way to do this.”

We have been, are, and always will be consumed with becoming more efficient, proficient and resourceful at everything we do. This mind-set has resulted in countless inventions and innovations.

Our ancestors went from bare hands to using a club because it was a more effective means of hunting prey. They developed spears because it was better than bludgeoning prey to death. They improved the spear so as it could be thrown, which was far more efficient than chasing after the great woolly mammoths. Eventually, they transformed the spear into a bow and arrow – an even more effective means of hunting prey.

The human race’s search for efficiencies has not been limited to hunting prey. Consider communications: Carving stone tablets led to ink on paper to using a printing press to radio to television to the Internet and beyond, wherever and whatever that might be.

In business we refer to becoming better by many names – efficiencies, higher yield, productivity, highest and best use, economies of scale, work smarter. No matter the name, each is focused on one objective: getting more from any and all resources, whether that be assets, time or talent.

Our networking efforts are no different. We need to make them more efficient. But how do we go about achieving that goal?

After all, creating a productive network is all about developing strong relationships, which takes time. And it is counterintuitive to think that we can make more efficient something that takes time.

Like making a fine wine, the networking process cannot be rushed. Despite the fact that there are no shortcuts to effective networking, there are opportunities for being more proficient with our efforts.

Consider this: There are only 24 hours in a day. At least half of these we devote to personal time – family, sleeping or other matters. A large chunk of the balance is devoted to actually being productive – so-called “working for a living.” The remainder – which is only a few hours – is ours to be networking.

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In an effort to become more proficient with our networking, the issue is not whether or not we take advantage of each and every minute of these precious hours. The issue is what we do when we are networking. Here are some examples:

Example #1: When we look to involve ourselves in a new group or organization, are we inclined to head for the group in which most everyone else we know belongs?

Would we not be better served selecting a group or organization that will provide a more unique experience? Absolutely. Meeting new people immediately expands our network, which benefits us. Better still, because we are better networked, we actually enhance our relationships with those we already know.

Example #2: Is lunch a time to socialize with those that we know best, either exchanging gossip or rehashing the big game?

Would not our time be better spent exploring and developing new relationships? Absolutely. And we do not have to allocate every lunch to new relationships. By earmarking two or three luncheons each month, we will expand our network plenty.

Example #3: At business or social events, do we seek the comfort of familiar company?

Do we not become better networked if we have the courage to abandon the usual suspects to interact with new and interesting people? Absolutely. When we arrive at an event, we should venture out and attempt to meet someone whom we can introduce to others we know at the event.

These are only a few examples of how we can network more effectively. Beyond this, there are literally dozens of other ways that we can make a better use of time we spend networking.

The point is, we need to use our innate drive to be more efficient to improve our networking, just as our ancestors did to improve their hunting. In short, we need to focus on networking smarter, not harder.