

# Networking...Why Bother?

By Neal Gray, *Action International Business Coach*

Everybody says networking is so great and yet only a few do it. Why should you get involved? Isn't it really just a waste of time? I went once and I didn't get any business so why bother? I have other things to do.

Have you heard someone say this? Have you said it? If you read no further, understand just one thing...it's not a waste of time unless you make it a waste. Networking is an extremely valuable tool for both business and personal reasons. The wider the network of people that you know and who know you the more positive things will happen. The problem is a "want something for nothing" attitude that is prevalent in business, especially small and mid-sized business. I know people who go to a networking function, belly up to the bar, chat with a few acquaintances and wonder when someone will walk up to them and offer them some business. This isn't networking. At best you could call it net-socializing, but don't just stand there and expect the business to come to you. Take action and introduce yourself to someone you don't know.

The reason networking doesn't work for so many who "tried it" is that they haven't done the work (which really isn't all that much). When you network well you do several things with focus, discipline, and intent of purpose. The goal of networking is to get business and contacts for yourself and others. Don't think it is complicated and don't make it complicated. Try these steps...

- 1) Find a networking event in your community (a Chamber event is a good place to start)
- 2) Put it on your schedule in ink and commit to yourself that you will be there at least 15 minutes early.
- 3) Decide how many new people you will talk to and get key information from. Also get their OK for you to call them in the next couple days to set up a time to meet.
- 4) Take a brochure or Flyer to give to each new person you talk with. If your goal is 10 people then take 10 brochures or flyers. When you have talked with 10 new people and your brochures are gone you will have hit your target. Take twice as many business cards.
- 5) Your goal really isn't how many you pass out but how many new people do you talk to. Make sure that you collect a business card from everyone you talk to.
- 6) While you are there it is OK to say hello to people you know but only take 10 seconds to shake their hand and move on to find someone new to spend time with. With each new person, plan to spend only 2 or 3 minutes right now.
- 7) While networking... don't have a drink in your hand, be the last in line for food so you have more time to talk to people, don't sit next to anyone you know or work with, shake hands with everyone at your table (everyone in the meeting if it's not too large of a group).
- 8) Always look for ways to help others first, yourself second.
- 9) Bring someone you know along with you to give them an opportunity to network too. Teach them these steps so they don't get offended when you spend little or no time with them during the event.
- 10) Last, and possibly most important, come back again and again. Networking most often creates significant results over time based on cultivating understanding, friendships, and relationships. Networking does not work if you only do it once or twice. It has an accumulative nature as a snowball rolling down a hill. With time the ball gets huge.

So, if you want networking to work and be worth your time, put your time into working the network. The great thing about networking is that it costs you little money and can result in excellent results if only you put in the time and follow the steps.

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