



Networking: Keeping Your Circles Alive

Referrals from your network don't just happen. It takes time, energy and resourcefulness. Bottom line networking is not a transaction, but a relationship and those take time!

"Seek first to understand and then be understood," states Steven Covey author of Seven Habits of Highly Effective people. In essence that is precisely what good networkers do: they make themselves indispensable by becoming resources that you can't do without. Think of concierges at hotels, they know everything that guests might want to need during their stay at hotels. Good networkers are lobbyists, yes, those damned pesky public relations professionals, fundraisers and restaurateurs. Bottom-line, they know people.

When distilled to essentials networking is all about building relationships with your target markets. Think how long it took you to make friends, court and get married. Networking is similar. Once there is trust and confidence, networking can reap dividends.

For lawyers, solo practitioners, associates and managing partners this is an indispensable part of their business, even though they think it ranks at the bottom of their priority list. Building your book of business requires grass roots networking, regardless of whether you think marketing is overrated hype and fluff. Regardless of gender, geography and ethnicity, people do business with people who they know and trust. Yet, with all the demands on our time not only is it tempting to designate networking at the bottom of the priority list but it is also so easy to ignore. Like personal relationships networking takes time, effort and solid commitment from you.

Where do you start? Have a clear focus, think strategically and long term. Make a good first impression by becoming a good listener, Become a trusted resource. David Maister's book "Trusted Advisor" is indispensable to anyone in the professional services.

Bar associations, committees, other attorneys, alumni of law firms, college alumina and target industry groups are good places to start.

Expert and author of "Million Dollar Networking" Andrea Nirenberg says, "We should be connecting with people whether its email or in person everyday, networking should part of daily activities."

Most of us overlook attending professional development events/conferences, meeting people for coffee/tea, all as part of networking and often view networking events as only where business cards are exchanged added Nirenberg.

When done effectively, networking accomplishes several tasks including but not limited to finding a job, finding new clients, turning prospects into clients, professional development, forming strategic alliances and finding good referral sources for your business to list a few.

To maintain your network you need to keep lines of communications open with those individuals in your circles. This is where most people drop the ball. They meet, have some sort of connect and then lack in follow up.

Two immediate strategies to apply include:

- Immediately after event, preferably the next day, send a handwritten note or card, reiterating something of interest to both of you from the conversation and express your interest in keeping in touch. Include your business card. Handwritten notes are lot more effective than an e-mail thank you. Don't wait longer than 48 hours.
- After a fortnight has passed contact that person and arrange to meet for tea or coffee.

Key to maintaining your network is by becoming an invaluable resource. Initially when building relationships you can do that by using some of the following tactics:

- Find something to add value to the relationship quickly, such as sending them a link to an article or it could be changes in the law that impacts them.
- Introduce them to a referral source that may be of value to them. This could be an executive of professional group or a reporter.
- Invite them to a company event, or another networking event. Or if you come across an event that is not of interest to you, forward it to someone in your networking circle. A simple task as this requires nothing more than FYI and hitting the forward button.
- Send them extra tickets that you may have to sporting/spa/concerts, don't let your company tickets go to waste. It's a very good way of "keep in touch marketing."
- Don't forget birthday cards, anniversary cards and thank you notes. People remember them and they go a long way.
- Send a note congratulating them on a promotion.

All this involves time, commitment and being consistent in all your efforts. You want to stay in touch rather than getting in touch with them when you are desperate. As your relationships strengthen you will find other ways of becoming a resource. In turn other people will introduce you to their networks. Finally, keeping score will not result in building good networks.

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