NETWORKING TIPS

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Why is it important to be able to network effectively?

Networking is about sharing information, ideas, resources and opportunities. Members of a network look to each other for advice and contacts, and create a support system for each other.

Importantly, networking also increases the fun and social side of work. Networking is also **vital** to knowing what's going on with your competitor organisations, the industry you're in, and the subject matter specialty you're interested in.

However, Effective Networking is not necessarily something that many people do intuitively. It is often a "learned skill". To get the most benefit out of networking we may simply need someone to show us some of the tools and techniques.

What is Effective Networking?

We view networking as a life-skill based on meaningful interactions and relationships, not just something you do when you want something from someone.

Effective Networking isn't a process of making cold-calls to people you don't know. It's a combination of

- forming new relationships,
- keeping in touch with people and
- meeting others by sharing contacts, support and advice

BENEFITS OF EFFECTIVE NETWORKING

- The aim from networking is to build solid relationships for the long-term – good networks make it easier to get what you need
- It is estimated that the average person knows about 250 people. And each of those people knows, in turn, another 250 or so people. This means that for each new person you meet, you gain access to a potential pool of 62,500 people separated from you by just two degrees

Imagine the odds, then, that out of so many people, you would NOT find one person who would be a source of information, assistance, fun, jobs.

FACTORS FOR EFFECTIVE NETWORKING:

KNOW YOURSELF AND YOUR CURRENT NETWORK

So you know what you have to offer and already receive

DEFINE YOUR OBJECTIVES

What do you want to achieve (to meet people for fun, who share a similar interest, work in a similar industry etc).

BE VISIBLE AND APPROACHABLE

Be where people are either in person or online. Be cheerful, confident and straightforward – authentic.

GIVE BEFORE GETTING

If you want others to open doors for you, open the door to them first. Give before you expect to get, and you will develop a good network who will always be glad to help you *because you're one of them*. So, think about what you can do for members of your network in exchange for information, contacts and support.

If you become a powerful resource for other people by sharing your knowledge and skills, you will gain personal and professional trust and credibility which is the basis of any networking relationship.

CONNECT PEOPLE / REFER YOUR CONTACTS TO PEOPLE IN YOUR NETWORK WHO CAN SOLVE THEIR PROBLEMS.

You'll be seen as a problem solver and those who benefit from your referrals are more likely to provide you with referrals in return.

Remember what people have said to you and put the details in your contact list. As you talk to others, see if you can make any connections. It's likely that you've experienced a situation where you say "Oh, someone I spoke to earlier knows all about that. Shall I introduce you?" a) you are solving someone else's problem and b) you have just added a notch to your reputation as a useful contact.

SEEK ADVICE, NOT HELP

Some people think that if you approach people for advice rather than help, that's something they can provide without fear of commitment.

THANK PEOPLE

for their assistance

PUT PEOPLE IN YOUR CONTACT DATABASE

- Your networking efforts will be a waste of time without effective contact management. When you meet or contact people, enter the information you learn into your contact management software; make note of their interests, what you've shared with them, and when and how to contact them next
- If you're given a business card, when you get a moment alone after moving on from the person is to write a couple of memory joggers on the card about a) what you spoke about, b) personal info you picked up from the conversation

FOLLOW UP

- After an event within a couple of days drop a quick email saying you enjoyed our chat the other night on [topic]. Here's an article/paper/etc that I thought you might be interested in/might give you some more info/help with what **you** were talking about."
- *Follow up* on information, advice, or leads given to you

PROVIDE VALUABLE INFORMATION ON A REGULAR BASIS FOR FREE

- A weekly or monthly newsletter, blog etc is one way to establish your credibility. When this provides solutions, it will be shared by people in your network, further lengthening your list of contacts.

TREAT EVERYONE WITH RESPECT

You never know when or where people you know are going to pop up. Be courteous to everyone – they could be your next colleague, boss or neighbour. Also, people in networks share good and bad information and you don't know who knows whom.

DO NOT SELL

You can see people selling a mile off. Clutching their business cards and visibly working the room, they are coming to get you. Some networking groups are set up for this very purpose and that's absolutely fine providing you know that's the basis of the networking event. Otherwise, you should build a relationship first, give before receiving, be a preferred source of knowledge and then find out if someone can help you.

Everybody knows the basics for meeting people at a function, such as:

- **Firm Handshake** – (no dead fishes or vice grips) The handshake is one of the most important communication tools you have, in a few seconds it can help you convey confidence, assurance, interest and respect
- **Smile –** Conveys that you have a positive attitude, interested in talking to the person standing in front of you
- **Appearance** – Hygiene and appearance are key to making a good impression
- **Eye contact** – maintain eye contact throughout the handshake and introduction
- **Wear your name badge on the right** – Why? Try this. Turn to the person next to you and shake hands. Which side of the person was most noticeable?

PREPARATION

Know Your Audience

Know something about the people or function you are attending so you have something in common to talk about. However, don't have too many expectations because things can be very different to what you expected.

- **Introduction** – have your Personal Introduction prepared so you aren't tongue tied when you meet someone
- **Latest happening**s – Read up on news, current affairs so you know what is happening in your community, country and world

EVERYONE COULD BE POTENTIAL NEW FRIEND / CONTACT. YOU ARE ON SHOW THE WHOLE TIME

- Take a moment to view the room. Familiarise yourself with the layout, crowd.
- Move through the room with a gentle smile on your face
- Always be very polite to waiter staff, door people etc. Makes you a welcome part of the occasion
- Act as if you belong. Almost **behave like the host** – offer to help people get people a drink, canapé
- Balance between being too pushy and too aloof

PERSONAL AUTHENTICITY

- You only have a few seconds to make a first impression
- Be authentic and strive to convey your strong personal traits: integrity, reliability, team player, sincere, punctual, has a good sense of humour

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION VS. ELEVATOR PITCH

- Your "personal introduction" is different to your elevator pitch (which is more like a sales pitch and lasts ~30 secs) which may or may not follow an introduction
- Your introduction should include: your name, how you fit into the situation, and why the other person should care. Use words such as help, provide, contribute, give, serve, teach and solve
- E.g. *I'm John Smith, I'm a speaker at this seminar from SMS Management & Technology, and we help leading companies solve their business problems*

HOW / WHOM DO YOU APPROACH?

ENTERING & EXITING STRATEGIES

Entering Conversations

- Warm up with people you feel naturally drawn to. At least you've made friends
- If you see many groups in any room, find the group with three or more people who look and sound like they are having a good time. Stand in the periphery and when acknowledged step in and respond
- Follow a comment from someone in the group with a question or useful piece of information
- Use the prepared introduction (vary slightly if required), smile, make eye contact, sturdy handshake
- When you see someone in your group's periphery, step back. In doing so, you will have included the excluded and that is memorable
- If there is someone that you specifically want to meet, try and find someone that can introduce you

Exiting Conversations

To make the most of a networking opportunity, do not monopolise your time by talking to the same 2 or 3 people all night, be prepared to exit a group and join another

- After an interesting conversation, interrupt *yourself* (not someone else), indicate the conversation was pleasant, interesting, and informative; maybe offer a phrase or sentence that summarises the conversation. Offering a hand for a handshake, signals "the end". Ask for a card if appropriate and offer one of yours. Then walk a quarter of the room over to another individual or group so your conversation partner won't think you just turned your back
- After a conversation that is belaboured, still be polite because doing otherwise could cause a problem down the road. Offer your hand for the handshake and in a most upbeat voice, "I hope you enjoy the rest of the meeting/party/conference, etc". And still walk a quarter of the room away from the person

ENGAGING BENEFICIALLY WITH PEOPLE

- **Listen to what people are interested in** - To be a great networker, your aim is to help people or to connect them to others who can help them. This requires excellent listening skills. Be actively interested in people. Instead of planning your next line, listen to what people are saying. **(They are telling you what they want to talk about)**. You can take the hints and build 'big talks' from there
- **Gain an understanding of others' concerns and problems.** Then you can make quick assessments as to whether they would have any interest in the solutions you provide. The objective of networking is not just to expound on your credentials. Most people waste the few precious moments they have with new and existing contacts by focusing just on themselves. It's better to spend most of that time asking questions and collecting information
- **Ask open ended questions** – like: How did you do that, what happened. Be wary that you do not JUST ask questions and bring nothing to the discussion, as that could be considered as prying or probing, which in turns can be considered as offensive
- **Look at the people you are talking with.** Don't get caught constantly looking around the room or over your shoulder for others
- **Get the contact details** of people you meet. Not just their business card but other key information. TIP: If you're given a business card, when you get a moment alone after moving on from the person, write a couple of memory joggers on the card about a) what you spoke about, b) personal info you picked up from the conversation

REMEMBERING NAMES

- You've just been introduced to someone, and ten seconds later, you cannot recall what their name is… Happened to you?
- *Get it right*. If it is not easy like Bill or Jane, ask the person to repeat it (and spell it) if necessary
- *Use the name*. Say the name once or twice in the first few sentences of discussion. This will make it much more difficult to forget
- *Associate the name*. Rhyming or picture association helps here
- Saying someone's name gets that person's attention. With this, you can build rapport and make a personal connection

BUSINESS CARDS

- Always carry them
- Use a Card Case, and keep it well stocked
- Hand them out: when one is asked for, after a conversation at a networking event, if an initial conversation identifies that a subsequent meeting will be of value
- Ask for one if you want to follow up (body language and reluctance tells a lot here)

THANK KEY PEOPLE AND SAY GOODBYE BEFORE YOU LEAVE

FOLLOW UP

- We've already discussed the importance of follow up. It's key to networking but few do this at all, much less well
- Always do it if you said you would
- Ask if a person has a preference, and use it – some people have strong preferences as to phone calls versus emails etc

TO SUM UP

- Networking is not just about what you can get out of it but what you can offer to others
- If you become a powerful resource for other people by sharing your knowledge, skills and contacts, you will gain business trust and credibility which is the basis of any networking relationship
- The aim from networking is to build solid relationships for the long-term which makes getting what you need easier
- Be careful what you put on Linked in, Facebook and other social networking sites