



NETWORK YOUR WAY TO SALES SUCCESS

by Leigh Wallinger

Networking has become a very popular activity today, especially amongst the owners of small and medium sized businesses (SMEs). Usually the reason people decide to network is to find new contacts to whom they can sell their company's products and services. Often people start networking when they suddenly realise they need more prospects – or worse, when they realise they need more revenue.

They go out to networking events, swap business cards with other people and wonder why they can't find any prospects who want to transact with them immediately. After a while, the process stops with the conclusion that "Networking doesn't work".

Does networking work? Done properly, the answer is yes.

Networking is a skill and it can be learnt. Successful networking requires you to invest both time and effort. In addition, successful networking requires you to be patient. Business opportunities will arise, often from the most surprising places.

However, some people who get it completely wrong. These are the ones who make everybody they interact with feel both uncomfortable and pressured. The secret to networking is to achieve exactly the opposite effect. When you meet someone at a networking event you must go out of your way to make that person feel totally at ease and relaxed.

Networking is most effective when you adopt a "give to get" mentality. This concept was one of the principles written about by Napoleon Hill when he published his book 'Think and Grow Rich' back in 1937. In it, he wrote "You must give before you get".

This means that when you are networking, you should adopt the mantra of

What can I do for you?

Rather than the more common "What can you do for me?". The latter isn't networking, it is more like pumping others for every bit of information they may have that might be useful to you. This leaves people feeling pressured and uncomfortable – which isn't the best foundation on which to build a lasting relationship.

It is in this one area that many business owners get it completely wrong.

Let's say you are at an industry event to do some networking and you bump into a Director or Senior Manager of an organisation that you would like to be doing business with. Remind yourself that this isn't a sales call and start asking questions. Instead of trying to work out how to sell to this person, move the conversation onto them – their business, their plans for their business and their problems.

Take great care not to drift into your sales pitch when you are asked about your business. A short 30-second description is sufficient. Then focus back onto them. Draw out of the conversation the issues which are currently causing them concern. If you think your Company might be able to help address one or more of these issues, agree that you'll contact each other after the event. Never sell at a networking event. Don't spend all your time with this one person otherwise you will have missed numerous other opportunities.

When you attend networking events, get to meet as many people as you can.



Networking isn't transactional.

If you turn to networking to find new sales prospects, it is very easy to fall into the trap of trying to make networking transactional. The philosophy of "give to get" isn't transactional and this can be a strange paradigm for transaction-oriented business people.

With "give to get", you give to person A with no thought or expectation of person A giving you something in return. You will receive from person B something that will help you and you are under no obligation to give something to person B in return. The phrase "Sow and ye shall reap" describes the way networking works. Give to others and you receive something that is of help to you, eventually.

Use networking events to meet lots of new people. Work hard to find ways to help the people you meet, with no expectation of getting something back directly from them. Put your trust into the "Give to Get" approach and let the power of networking work for you.

Networking and selling do not, on the surface, fit together well. Networking is all about giving to others and engaging with people without judgement as to their value to you. Sales is about transactions, about getting orders and qualifying people as being a "good prospect".

Getting sales by networking is all about building relationships. These lead you into other relationships. At all times you give to others and others will then give back to you what you are looking for – prospects, opportunities, new markets ideas, new partners etc.

The bottom line is that networking will lead to sales. It is up to you to trust and believe in Napoleon Hill's wise words.

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