

Educational Tip of the Week NetWORKING

I was recently at a Stamford Chamber event where I ran into a business professional, who was standing by himself near the hors'd' oeuvres table with a drink. I introduced myself, asked him what he did and then said, "Out of curiosity, why are you standing here alone?" His reply: "Oh, I just come to these to socialize..." So this guy spent \$35 just to stand in the corner? If I had been really crass, I would have told him to go home, go to a nearby bar and throw darts – but do anything other than stand like a popsicle.

How many business owners really view networking as netWORKING? You work all day in your business, you bust your butt to get warm leads, you worry all the time about getting new clients, so if you are going to attend networking events, shouldn't you have a plan BEFORE you get there? Why waste the money, if you could actually take some time to relax, spend time with your family, or plan your next vacation. Because any of these would be more productive than to meander around a room full of people without a goal in mind.

Networking is Not An Afterthought (and bad networking is the easiest way to turn off a prospect)

As with all business endeavors – and especially marketing and personal branding – you get out what you put in. So if you are going to get the most out of networking you need to have a plan before you walk through the door. Here are some great tips from top notch networkers.

- 1) Never go to a networking event unless you know there will be prospects there that can potentially get you business. Sure, you might hit it lucky, run across some stranger by accident that turns into a million dollar deal, but the reality of that happening is pretty slim. So why waste your time? Your time is money.
- 2) For every networking event you attend, identify five people you must meet, plus another five backups. Not everyone that you are targeting as prospects will show up at your event so you have to have a backup plan. Ideally, you want to keep the number small so you can ensure you really focus on the people that are absolutely your target prospects.
- 3) Before you go to the event, rehearse what you are going to say to the people you want to meet. Practice in front of the mirror, or with a spouse, friend or colleague. NetWORKING is a business art that needs to be practiced over and over again. No matter how long you've done it, you still want to keep yourself at the top of your game.
- 4) Read from the experts: If you've never read Zig Zigler or any of the other true experts on sales, then you owe it to yourself to buy a couple of books and really study the science of salesmanship. The statistics say that less than 1% of the population are born as salespeople. The other 99% have to work at it. If you're one of the 1%, then you've got it made. If you're not, practice, practice and keep practicing.

- 5) When you get to the sign up desk at the event – especially at chamber events – get there reasonably early and scan the name tags. Check off mentally or on a small sheet of paper, the names of your targets that are listed as potential attendees. If they're not listed, then ask the event registration people if they are on the list to attend – especially if you are a member of the organization, that's what the staff is there for. So put them to work for you.
- 6) Once the event kicks off, don't get bogged down talking to people you don't need to meet. Work on getting to your targets first. If a senior representative of the organization is there, ask for an introduction. If you can't reach them, then there's no harm in walking up to a group of people and say, "hey have you seen XXXX? They said they were going to be here and I promised I'd look them up." Keep asking, because sooner or later one of these cliques is going to point you in the right direction.
- 7) When you do get to meet your prospect and after you've introduced yourself, don't start selling. There's no greater turnoff than the bore that immediately starts pitching you for business – you've experienced this yourself. Instead, start asking questions. Ask them everything you can about them and their business. Make them feel special – the center of attention. If the conversation does start to turn to business then keep it focused and don't overstay your time – because they're there to network as well. Instead, suggest to your prospect that you meet with them for a cup of coffee or for breakfast or lunch. Try to get time on their calendar when they're right in front of you, thank them and move on.
- 8) Let's not forget business cards. But first, after you've had a chance to talk to your prospect you need to decide if they really are a prospect. If they're not, there's no point in exchanging cards with someone you don't need to follow up with. However, if you do qualify them as a good prospect always ask for their business card first. If they give you their card freely, that will give you some sign that there is mutual interest. If they hesitate, or say that they're out, then you know you're going to have to spend more time to get them on board.
- 9) Once you've hit all five of your key targets, you can choose to focus on your backups, you can go home, or look for the random opportunity. The key thing is that you've accomplished your mission for the event. Mission accomplished, so go home because you've earned it.

Following these simple steps will make net*WORKING* more efficient and rewarding for you. Moreover, you don't need to hang out at organization events until your feet hurt and you are bored to tears.