

Headline: THE SCIENCE OF SCHMOOZE

Intro: Making new connections an important part of business

Byline: Karen Mracek



‘It’s not what you know, it’s who you know. But for smart executives, the key to success actually lies in both whom they know and what they know.

Networking is a reciprocal process in which you share ideas, leads, information, advice, brainstorming, laughter—and sometimes hockey tickets.

Business people need to network to make connections they need to reach

their professional goals, said Rose Slaymaker, vice president of Nemec Marketing Group, who educates customers on effective marketing techniques from networking to advertising in order to reach their target audience.

For people like me who view networking as a key part of being a business resource to others, networking provides great fulfillment of an inner need to help others, she said. I see networking as a key part of marketing that every businessperson should be a part of, and it’s what I coach my clients on how to do as part of marketing their business.

The best networkers have savvy and common sense. It’s not a work style, it’s a lifestyle. Some of the best networkers don’t even know they’re networking. They’re just out there sharing ideas and themselves.

But even the best networking situations can prove to be a waste of time if it’s not done properly. And even the most seasoned networkers can make mistakes.

For example, going to an event without a goal of what you hope to take away can prove detrimental. Having goals such as meeting 10 new people or growing business relationships with three existing customers is important to managing time at events, Slaymaker said. If your goal is to meet new people at a networking event, then definitely don’t hang out with people you already know.

Other things to remember are business cards, a firm handshake and a smile. Another mistake I see people make while networking, is talking more than they listen, Slaymaker said.

And worst of all, is not following through on what you said you’d do. I advise people to take notes on the back of a person’s business card with a reminder of what the follow action is.

Regardless of where a person is, networking is very important to conducting business. Being in the right place and right time can lead to your next business opportunity—it’s critical to be visible in the community, Slaymaker said.

One of the biggest debates in networking is quality versus quantity of the contacts you make. Quality contacts will help

you reach your goals more quickly, she said. Quantity helps from the standpoint that, the more people you know, the easier it is to get connected with the right people. It only takes one person to help get your foot in the door.

Here are some tips for networking and making the most of your time with other professionals:

- Set your networking goals. What do you hope to achieve by networking with your peers? More sales, more customer leads or just helpful information? Setting your goals now will help you focus your networking efforts.
- Join existing networking groups. There is power in numbers—and that certainly applies to networking. By becoming a member of several groups, you can ensure that you will be creating more opportunities for your business.
- Evaluate what your interests are as well as what your goals are and find a group that meets those goals, Slaymaker said. There are so many opportunities out there, if you have the intent to find a networking group, you will.
- Become a volunteer. If you have extra time, you can volunteer for local or state events. As you get yourself out in the public eye, your company will become more visible.
- Get informed ahead of time. The more you know, the more your peers will be drawn to you. One of my goals is to be a sponge and learn as much as I can in as many ways as possible, Slaymaker said.
- Be sincere. Don’t say things you don’t mean or make offers you have no intention of keeping. In networking, as in business in general, maintaining your reputation is critical.
- Work on your communication skills. You will need to be able to state clearly what you are looking for when you are networking. My recommendation to someone who is introverted is to set goals to build their communication skills, which also helps to build self-confidence, Slaymaker said. Facing your fear and stepping out of your comfort zone by going to a networking event is an excellent way for shy people to start developing their communication skills.
- Learn to share. If something has worked for you in the past, do not keep it a secret. Sharing your successes—and even your failures—with other professionals will build relationships and gain you even more networking partners.
- Work on the follow-through. Many busy business owners get caught up and forget to follow through on networking promises. Don’t disappoint your new networking associates. Follow through if you want better relationships.
- Be indispensable. If you have a great deal of knowledge, you can become a networking resource on your own. By sharing your knowledge, you will gain more potential referrals and more networking partners.

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