

Grippin' and Grinnin'

Savvy Networking Increases Your Personal and Professional Impact

Networking...some folks think of it as grippin' and grinnin'. Others view it as necessary torture and still others see it as an effective means for personal and professional development. Whatever your definition, we can agree that networking is among the most essential business skills. However, by way of definition, a network is a web of connected colleagues.

The most effective networks include representatives from different industries, positions and levels. Networking is the act of building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships. These informal connections yield valuable information that may not be available to the competition. These inner circle affiliations are where deals are made, options are weighed and opinions are influenced.

Purposeful, powerful networking enhances our visibility. Being seen in the right places by the right people is something almost everyone, in most every industry, desires. Networking skills enhance marketability. Employers want to hire people who have good contacts in multiple industries. Those of us engaged in entrepreneurial pursuits value colleagues who can help us get the inside track on business opportunities.

Networking also enhances our ability to devise creative solutions to workplace problems. Think of how many times you have called friends to find out how their companies approached a similar problem. That is the beauty of a strong network. We open the door to limitless creativity with ideas other than our own. Think of networking as the ongoing professional development that keeps you in the loop. Net-

Mindset Murderers

If you hear yourself using these phrases, it's time for a mental tune-up:

- We tried that 10 years ago...
- We've always done it this way...
- I'm just a pee-on...
- I can't...
- I wish...

Replace these killer phrases with more positive alternatives. For instance, "it'll never work here..." can be replaced with "that hasn't worked before, but let's give it a try."

working lends opportunities for information exchange, idea generation and personal growth. This article provides networking basics and practical ideas for expanding your network.

Mindset and Manners, Image and Inventory are the pillars of skillful networking. These four competencies make or break many a network. Becoming skilled at each of the four is a necessary first step.

Mindset and Manners

Mindset, the way we think, speaks volumes in our verbal and nonverbal communication. The correct mindset begins with positive thoughts before we enter any networking situation. Creating the proper mindset starts with our self-talk. What do we say to encourage ourselves on a regular basis? What do we say to ourselves about networking? It is important to begin creat-

ing a positive, productive mental attitude.

Begin by examining the language and imagery you use to describe yourself, your products, your customers and your colleagues. Do you generally use language that is affirmative or do you opt for popular colloquialisms like "pee-on."


Think seriously about how you describe and define your life's situations. What killer phrases do you use? Once you identify them, you can begin changing your language and imagery. A positive, optimistic attitude is what separates winners from losers!

The next component of the Mindset and Manners duo is seemingly reaching a state of extinction, particularly with the overuse of so much technology. Let's start with the fundamentals "please" and "thank you."

When building your network, people will remember how you ask for what you want. Do you say please to everyone, regardless of their title? Do you remember to say thanks for everything — even the smallest task? And, have you heard of the thank-you note? This wonderful invention is the mark of the well-bred professional. A handwritten note goes a long way in creating a polished, professional image.

But, there is more to manners than please and thank you. Manners include having enough sense to wait your turn to speak. That's right — don't cut your colleagues off mid-sentence. Be quiet, listen, and then speak.

When you speak, don't swear. Now, this is the one that I am always working on. I frequently pepper my speech with a few colorful descriptors. I have to remind myself of the phrases I'd never use in front



of my mother. Those are the ones I try to leave out of business conversation as well.

Appropriate manners extend to good table manners. None of your body parts should be resting on the table. Your mouth should be closed when you chew. And, eat your meal at a reasonable pace. Please do not devour your food like this is your last supper. The same applies to alcohol. While it is fine to have a glass of wine while networking, it is not acceptable to guzzle the bottle. Drunken behavior creates a less-than-desirable image.

Manners extend to your use of technology as well. How many lunches have you attended where people spend half of their time on the cell phone or their pagers go off every 10 minutes. If you are going to spend time with a person, be with that person. Techno-intrusions are signs of bad manners. So, turn the cell phone off and put the pager on vibrate.

Techno-manners extend to the use of e-mail. Respond in a timely manner. And, be as courteous as you would be face-to-face, if not more. It's easy for e-mail messages to be considered curt, if not downright rude, when customary courtesies are neglected.

Image and Inventory

Image is the intangible impression we leave after every encounter. Image begins with how we dress. Wash and wear has confused many business people. They forget that essential step in the middle: ironing. Don't go on a sales call, or anywhere else for that matter, looking like you just rolled out of bed. Take the time to be neatly groomed. Invest that extra energy every time you walk out of the door.

I sometimes have lapses in this area. I was in the grocery store one Saturday, looking every bit like a vagrant: no makeup, wrinkled baggy shorts, hair kind of scary, oversized T-shirt and sneakers. I ran into one of my clients, the CEO of a hospital. I could have died, especially when he didn't even recognize me. The sad part is we had just met the Friday before and had been doing business together for sev-

eral months. But, that was a good lesson. I am now very conscious of how I look, even when I'm just going to the grocery store.

Image extends beyond clothing to include our accessories. Ten-cent ink pens are fine for 10-cent sales people. If you aspire to seven-figure accounts, look like you are already there. Invest in good pens, a high-quality brief case and a good pad holder. These little touches make the difference between dressed and well dressed. Don't forget, image is a reflection of your mindset. When you think you are bound for success, you work to get there.

Your image will be enhanced if you communicate effectively. That means thinking it through before you spit it out. That also means delivering your message clearly and succinctly. Just like you are very busy, so are the people with whom you network. Don't waste time, just get to the point!

And on your route to the point, avoid slang, idioms and figures of speech that could alienate colleagues. Overuse of technical jargon in non-technical settings is also something to avoid. Remember that communication skills are key in creating the right image.

Inventory is the last pillar. When you are preparing for a networking activity (and any activity that includes non-family members is a potential networking activity), stock up on your supplies. Be sure that you come prepared with plenty of business cards, samples (when applicable), giveaways, writing utensils, magnets, and whatever else constitutes your inventory.

I have a friend in Atlanta who owns a recruiting firm. She brings white chocolate candy bars, customized with her company's logo, to give to prospects and clients. This little touch leaves a sweet impression not soon to be forgotten.

With the basics of networking now covered, next month we'll explore the many opportunities for networking. **R**

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