

Your Individual Networking Design

Networking is a very important Marketing activity, and being prepared mentally and properly oriented for it is critical. Take a few minutes to consider the following 10 steps before you head out the door for your next networking event.

- 1. Check your attitude:** If you have negative beliefs about networking, find a way to embrace the activity so that your fear or hesitation aren't what people experience when they meet you. Come up with a way to make networking interesting for yourself.
What can you do to change your beliefs about networking being difficult or intimidating, and maybe turn it into something that you actually enjoy?
- 2. Be interested:** Add value first. Offer useful information. This will require that you listen for opportunities to make the offer of valuable information.
What do you have (product, service, knowledge, experience, etc.) that can add value for others?
- 3. Create a network:** If you wait to be part of a network until you need one, it's too late! It 's important to build a solid foundation of relationships which, after all, is the purpose of networking. Keep your networking engine in good working order.
How would you describe your current network? How would you like it to be? What actions might you take to improve or expand your network?
- 4. Stay in touch:** If the only time your networking contacts hear from you is when you need something, they will tend to avoid you. Develop a strategy for staying in contact with your network on a regular basis. Imagine if you heard from a contact once a year when she needs something. How would you feel about it?
Describe some of the ways that you currently use to stay in touch with your contacts. What are some additional ways that would serve to build those relationships?
- 5. Build relationships:** This is the whole purpose of networking – making connections and building relationships. Be aware of how you and your contacts can mutually benefit from the relationships that are formed.

How can you deepen the relationships you already have? How can you meet additional contacts who you know could add value for your business, and you for theirs?

6. **Always be prepared:** Like a good boy scout, take the time to prepare before you attend a networking event. Decide on the outcomes you want from the event. Then craft a plan for how you will achieve those outcomes.
What are some of the networking activities that you currently engage in? What are the results that you enjoy from those activities? Are there other groups that you would like to join? What do you want to gain from these experiences?
7. **Target opportunities:** If you have identified your target market (and please do this before you engage in networking activities), then you can select those networking opportunities that best fit your business goals. Save both time and money by carefully judging which ones will be best for you and your business.
What is your networking style? If smaller venues suit you best, then go to those rather than conferences where there are hundreds of people! The goal is to be at your best when networking so you have to know what will best suit your personality, schedule and comfort zone.
8. **Be creative:** It's true! We are always networking! You can network everywhere – if you want to. Networking doesn't require a formal setting or group events. You can network at the gym, at church, at your kids' softball game, in the grocery, at the bank. There are no limits – only your willingness to engage in conversation.
What are the nontraditional ways you could network and expand your connections? Are you willing to seize those opportunities?
9. **Quality vs Quantity:** It isn't the person who attends the most networking events who wins! Running from event to event won't get you the solid relationships you are seeking. There are key people who must be in your network. Connect with them.
Who are those people who must be in your network and you in theirs? How will you get to know them?
10. **Play up your value:** Once you recognize and own the value that you bring, consider who will most benefit from and appreciate that value. Direct your networking activities toward those people who will see your value.

Who will most benefit from knowing you? How will you benefit from a connection with them? Remember this is a give-and-take activity.

And, one more thing....**Follow up:** design a follow-up strategy that you will really use. Make it simple so you will do it! Follow-up with the connections made at a networking event is the most underused tactic for build relationships.

How do you follow up now? Are there ways that you might improve?

My two favorite quotes about networking:

Networking is marketing. Marketing yourself, marketing your uniqueness, marketing what you stand for. - Christine Comaford-Lynch

The currency of real networking is not greed but generosity. - Keith Ferrazzi