

“Thoughtful” Networking *by Cathy Kuzel*

Networking is essential to the growth of your business.

Building relationships and a rapport with potential clients is a big part of doing business.

Since many decision makers rarely attend the local networking events, how do you build a rapport with them if they're not there?

You can keep going to the events, sampling the food, exchanging business cards with those willing to speak with you (some not!) and in general, waste your time.

Or, you can put your thinking cap on and be smart about it.

How can you leverage your network to get your foot in the door of these companies?

If you had the choice to do business with someone you know or a complete stranger, who would you choose? The other side to that is when we need a service, a product or information, we ask people we know and trust to provide us with a referral.

Referrals are the key to opening doors to companies that you want to do business with. At these 'doors' are 'gatekeepers' that decision makers employ to qualify who gets through and who doesn't.

It's frustrating but true.

I always search for the other 'door', someone past the gatekeeper or even a person who knows the 'gatekeeper' who can assist me. Networking with these people is important in an environment that pays for not what you know but **who** you know – and who knows **you!**

1. Clarify your target market and value proposition

It's quite likely that your product or service fits better in certain companies than others.

For example, my specialty is sales, but not all sales organizations are a good match for me. With sPearWay Ltd., I work in the B2B (business to business) environment on complex software sales requiring time and multiple calls. That's important for people to know or else they'll try to connect me with the wrong people.

Practice and perfect your **20 Second Infomercial™**. Be able to articulate clearly your value proposition - the benefits of doing business with you.

What are the people you want to reach struggling with? How do you help

them improve their bottom line? Increase their profit ratio? Realize their goals?

When you focus on those areas in business where you can make a difference, your success at networking multiplies. Trying to be all things to all people means it's all over.

2. Focus , focus, FOCUS!

Before you attend your next networking event, think about who you'd like to meet.

What company are they with? What position do they have in the company? What challenges are they facing? Will someone you know be at the event to make an introduction?

I try to find out who will be going to the event especially if I've been try to connect with a certain person. With this information I can maximize my time and efforts. Be willing to state exactly what you're looking for. You'll be amazed at the results.

3. They're Right Under Your Nose!

That's right, the people you already know may have a connection that's perfect for you.

Don't wait!

Talk to your friends, family and associates - right now! Most people hesitate to ask for the introduction. They assume their contacts wouldn't want to be bothered. (We all know what happens when we assume!) 6 Degrees of Separation – it's a fact!

4. Connect, don't Collect.

To be successful in networking, you have to be willing to help the other person. I recently read in an article on networking: "The Law of Reciprocity states that people want to help others who help them."

Next time you meet someone, don't just collect their business card, find out what makes them tick.

That's right. You have to pay it forward in networking. It doesn't have to be a huge payment; just something that shows you've got their interests in mind.

5. Go where they go

Still not connecting? If company decision makers aren't where you are, go where they are.

So where do corporate decision makers go?

Conferences and trade shows in their specific markets/industry are the best bets.

Not sure which ones? Call the administrative assistant (yes! The gatekeeper!) and ask their opinion on which events they feel are worthwhile - this person is always a wealth of knowledge.

To be successful at networking, you have to be smart about it.

If you're not meeting the right people, then you're not in the right place. Hoping and wishing to connect with your 'ideal' client won't cut it. Instead, put your brain in gear and put some "thoughtful" purpose into your networking.

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About the Author

Cathy Kuzel, author of Are you a Collector or a Connector, publishes "Connect!" a monthly ezine providing free information and resources for entrepreneurs. She is a professional speaker and trainer on sales, customer service, professional development and a guru at networking.

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