

Networking is More than Events and Customer Referrals

By Stan Broesder, MBA

"All business is personal!"

Every business requires the development of personal relationships to succeed. Getting to know individuals so that they feel comfortable in recommending you to others is the benefit of great networking. But you have to start thinking beyond a customer referral in order to get the most benefit. Influential industry and business leaders can lead you to dozens or even hundreds of customers with one referral. There are many creative ways to network and to build your business. Some professionals feel that it is a waste of time because they have not learned how to network effectively.

There are many different techniques someone can use in networking. From handing out business cards to making a contact after an event, there is more to networking than just showing up to the function. Many professionals seek help realizing their need to develop their skills in this area. Since building personal relationships is critical to the success of any business, learning how to effectively network is a must.

The purpose of networking will ultimately be different for each individual. Depending on the business that you are in, and the position that you hold, plus other criteria, these will affect your networking purpose. Some networking events may be more appropriate for the sales staff of an organization while others may be more applicable to senior executives. You have to have an understanding of what you are trying to accomplish when you go to any networking event. Each event is different in how it is structured and what opportunities you will have to network. You must be flexible in your networking skills and learn to adapt. What may work at a Chamber of Commerce event may not work as well in an industry association event.

Planning is key

Planning for networking events is one of the biggest neglected areas of networking. A master networker takes the time to plan before going to any event. By planning we are not just referring to making sure you have enough business cards and your nametag. Think about who is sponsoring the event, who is going to be speaking (if there is one). What do you know about the sponsors and the speaker? Find out a little bit about them and how you may be able to serve them. This will be very beneficial when you go to speak to them and thank them for their sponsorship or speech. You will advance in your relationship building by the simple act of caring about them.

There are some general rules and courtesies that are often broken in networking. I have been guilty of such blunders myself and continually work to improve my skills. You cannot read a book on networking and be a master networker the same day. It takes practice and a conscious effort to learn how to effectively meet and greet people. Some are much more natural than others, and even those who seem so natural if they are truly good, learned somewhere along the way.

Understanding the value of each contact

Each person that you meet may be a source of referrals for customers for your business. But the master networker understands that the value of each individual is far greater than the referral of one client. Think about getting to know someone and building that relationship so that it is of mutual benefit to both of you. If that individual were to give you a referral once a quarter for 20 years and 75% of them turned into clients who then also gave you referrals you can begin to see the value of that one relationship.

But what about building a relationship with someone who can help you open doors to an association of potential clients. There are many individuals who have a sphere of influence that would be worth much more than just a client every quarter. Think about the individual who can invite you into the inner court by having you speak at one of their meetings, or write on a subject for their newsletter. These individuals are men and women of influence within a group connected by a common denominator. This individual may be able to give you access to hundreds or more just by building a relationship with someone who has a much larger sphere of influence. This type of relationship is not built by just going to Chamber meetings and passing out cards. It takes time, effort, planning, and a little caring.

Crossroads Consultants is a business consulting company that helps business owners and professionals to build their business through planning, marketing and sales development. The foundation for any business growth is in developing relationships with individuals and groups in such a way to benefit all concerned. If you are interested in knowing more about how you can grow your business and reach your goals call me at 704-736-9274.