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Six Keys to Successful Networking

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Regardless of business endeavor, meeting people and making new acquaintances is an increasingly important job skill. Successful networking forges relationships that are mutually helpful and beneficial whether or not one is involved in market research, market planning, public relations, advertising, sales or any other related activity that involves meeting people and expanding business contacts.

Despite its obvious importance, it is often the least well-implemented tool in a marketer's kit. Reasons for that vary, but experts say many people simply find it difficult to meet strangers and "ask for the sale" – whether that be a referral, recommendation, direction – or the actual sale.

Numerous sales training professionals have programs and methods to help people develop better networking skills, and nearly all have some elements in common. Here are six basic keys to better networking:

Be Precise & Have an Objective

Ask for the result you want. Don't leave it to chance that a contact is going to surmise your need – and willingly provide exactly what you need. Of course you don't ask for something that's beyond what someone you've just met will provide, but ask yourself: "Why are you networking and what would you like to achieve?"

Keep it simple. You're meeting people for the first time, so keep it light but focused. If you have a typical profile in mind – then seek it. If there's a particular company exec you would like to meet – then seek contacts who can facilitate that eventual meeting.

Determine Who Can Help

Who can help you with your objective? Does the person have the ability to make the connection, or can he or she lead to someone who can? Are they willing to do so?

A common mistake people make is to exceed the capacity of a new contact's willingness to help – or "over-ask." So don't. Instead, get to know the person. Ask questions about them, their interests, and if they know anyone else at the event.

Align Your "Ask" to Their Capability

If the person can't directly lead you to your objective, determine what they CAN lead you to. Remember you're networking - so network. A new contact might not be able to help you today – but perhaps they can tomorrow.

You should also be contacting regularly – and a person who might not be able to help you just might be in a position to assist someone you know, or vice-versa. Networking is a 2-way street, so good networkers look for opportunities to help others.

Ask for What You Need

At this point, you've learned a little about them. Now, find out about their needs. Offer any suggestions and / or display a willingness to assist them. Typically, people will respond in kind and ask how they might assist you. If they don't, let them know by offering the same kind of information they provided in response to your casual questions about their needs.

Be Considerate

In an appropriate way, show appreciation for the effort or help a contact has provided. This is dependent on your personal style and the level of support provided. A simple email or phone call will often suffice – but whatever you do, be sincere.

Maintain the Connection

Contacts are valuable – so keep in touch with the people you meet. Remember – you're building a network. Maintain contact through an occasional email, phone call, or get-together for coffee or lunch. As hard as it often is to network and build contacts – make an effort to keep them.



About the author

Gordon Cole is president of P2R Associates and a seasoned executive with a depth of operational, business development, sales, marketing and corporate communications experience. His extensive background in marketing communications and public relations spans more than 25 years and reflects a track record of success in both agency and corporate environments.

About P2R Associates

P2R Associates is an award-winning, strategic public relations and brand communications firm serving a diverse mix of international, national and local companies in a range of industries. Headquartered in Livonia, Mich., P2R provides clients with strategy-driven tactics, superior service and measurable results.

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