

# The Power of Small Business Networking

By *Lori Canterbury*

As someone once said, “The more people who know you and what you do, the more business you will have.” Is it really that simple? Many successful people believe that it is that simple when the concept of networking is taken seriously. Are there that many business people consciously networking out there? The answer is yes. Internationally known speaker, Dr. John Demartini, sums it up, “Knowledgeable people know facts. Successful and prosperous people know people.”

What is networking really? Susan RoAne, in her book, *The Secrets of Savvy Networking*, says the best definition of networking comes from her friend Sally Livingston, who defines networking as a “reciprocal process based on the exchange of ideas, advice, information, referrals, leads, and contacts where resources are shared and acknowledged.” However accurate, this sounds very formal and somewhat academic.

For small business owners, time is money and networking takes time, so any time and effort put into a networking event must ultimately generate sales. With this thought in mind, another good definition might be that networking is the ability to walk into a group of strangers and, in a short period of time, come out of the other side with a group of new business prospects. Now that sounds like a definition a small business owner can sink his teeth into.

Many business people have the misconception that networking must provide instant results. Rarely does a first time contact with someone at a networking event generate a same day sale. Instead, consider what Landy Chase, president of Rainmaker Associates, Inc.,

calls the five rules of networking. First, he says to be patient. It takes time to develop relationships with people who will eventually become customers. It also takes time to find the best networking opportunities. Second, he strongly urges business people to realize that the networking event is not a sales call. “Focus first on establishing business friendships, not customers.” Number three ties into the first rule when he says that persistence pays for those who are patient. It takes time to identify the “key players.” These people are the ones who are well connected and have networking down to an art. Chase says to make it a priority to become a part of this “Inner Circle.”

Rule number four is to be an active volunteer, which may include serving on local chamber of commerce committees and advisory boards of community organizations or becoming involved in local civic clubs. There is a catch. Volunteering should not be done solely for the purpose of personal gain. Sincerity and personal commitment to the cause are essential.

Successful networking also involves active follow up. Following any meeting with a quick handwritten note is a very effective way to reinforce a positive prior meeting. It is also a nice touch to follow up on any information learned about someone at a meeting, such as remembering a birthday, anniversary, or special event. Along these same lines, clipping an article of interest and mailing it to someone in the “Inner Circle” is usually a well-received gesture of friendship and concern.

Finally, it is crucial to remember the importance of body language in a networking situation. Things such as good posture and eye contact are non-verbal signals other people either consciously or subconsciously notice. A handshake speaks volumes about a new acquaintance. Supermodel Cindy Crawford strongly urges women in particular to have a

firm handshake and not to “give it that little lady finger wiggle.” A firm handshake certainly exudes confidence.

Small business owners have enough to worry about these days without fretting over developing networking skills, right? But in view of the information above, how can a small business owner afford *not* to network actively? Consider the Proverb that says, “If you want to be prosperous for a year, grow grain. If you want to be prosperous for ten years, grow trees. If you want to be prosperous for a lifetime, grow people.” Remember to make it fun and take the “work” out of networking - the results will be amazing.



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