

Member's Quarterly

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Feature

The Power of Networking – Go Beyond Social Media

Develop a more personal approach



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The cultivation of productive relationships in business will not only set you apart as a leader, it will also contribute to your personal brand as a business professional. No matter which business discipline you manage, genuine connections will enrich your effectiveness and contribute to your personal growth and marketability.

Connecting with other business professionals is not always an easy task and it can be much harder for some than it is for others. The people we want to connect with are busy and oftentimes cautious until they trust in our intentions. We fear rejection and sometimes don't have enough self-esteem to power through our fears or have the courage to initiate a conversation.

So how do you overcome the barriers to successful networking?

Guiding Principles! The five most important guiding principles of networking are Authenticity, Respect, Value, Trust and Practice.

Authenticity: Forging a long-term relationship requires preparation and knowing when to share your agenda if you have one. If you are attempting to connect with a specific individual, do your homework. Be knowledgeable about what the person is most known for and be prepared to ask meaningful and thought provoking questions when you finally have the opportunity to meet. If you do have an agenda, focus on the relationship first or you are more likely to have a short-term relationship. Long-term relationships are strengthened by the friendship that develops over time and friendship is earned through authentic acts of kindness. Most importantly be yourself at all times!

Respect: A positive demeanor is essential when trying to earn the respect of a colleague. A positive demeanor, or lack thereof, will dictate how you are perceived and will become the foundation of your personal brand. Demonstrate respect through action when possible as action will qualify your words of respect. Be on time for appointments and planned telephone conversations. Be efficient and respectful of the value of a person's time. Communicate with sincerity. When you eliminate combative communication and converse with an openness that demonstrates their needs are more important than your needs, you are sure to earn the respect of your new acquaintance. A connection that trusts in your sincerity will seek you out for future conversation and interaction.

Value: A reciprocal relationship will stand the test of time when both parties offer value to the other. Research may provide you with knowledge of your colleague's greatest need and meaningful conversation will also serve to strengthen your understanding of how you can provide value. Maybe you know someone they want to network with and can be the catalyst to that connection for them.

Trust: New connections are often more cautious and judgmental until a relationship is more established. Look them in the eye as it is a sign of confidence and honesty. Discover what you have in common and use it to nurture your connection. Ask a common acquaintance who is well respected to invite you both to lunch to initiate an introduction. Once a connection is made and a commitment is given, even one as simple as the sharing of a recipe, meet that commitment! An empty promise is sure to impact the trust a new acquaintance will have in your abilities.

Practice: The best way to eliminate fear or uncertainty is to practice your craft early and often. Look for opportunities to network everywhere. A casual conversation at a local charity event, a chance meeting at the local theatre or a thought provoking conversation at a professional association meeting are opportunities to practice your craft. Always be prepared to make a powerful connection with someone who will

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positively impact your life personally and/or professionally. Plan networking events proactively as your calendar will fill up quickly with day to day business needs if you don't take a proactive approach to network planning. Lastly, consider a mentor. Most likely you have a colleague who is fearless at networking events and makes connections with ease. The greatest compliment you can pay that colleague is to ask them to be your mentor. Their wisdom is priceless!

With the inception of social media and ease of electronic communication options, it is easier than ever to stay connected. Although there are more ways to connect and the speed of these mediums is immediate, setting yourself apart requires a more personal approach to networking. Make sincere and authentic attempts to connect in person, add value to every interaction and commit to personal acts of kindness and you will realize the power of a strong network.

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