

# 10 Tips for Successful Networking

Rita's Career Corner ...With Rita B. Allen

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Yes, another article about networking! Like it or not, the ability to network effectively and consistently remains one of the key ingredients in managing a successful career. Regardless of your field, industry, level or geography, it is essential to embrace networking as a positive, get comfortable with it and truly develop the 'art of networking'. I call it an 'art' because every individual will make it their own and create a landscape that is unique and appropriate for them. Let me suggest that we even toss out the term 'networking' and replace it with 'building relationships'. Think of it as having meaningful conversations and building productive connections. It is important to approach it as a relationship building process, with the goal of establishing, creating, and nurturing strong long lasting relationships through many venues. ALWAYS keep it real – be genuine, sincere and authentic! Start by engaging in activities that fit your style and are comfortable for you. Take it step by step rather than taking on too much that ends up overwhelming you. Find the right mix that works for you.

Many people still believe that it is most relevant when they decide to embark on a new job search, however, don't make the mistake of thinking that's the only time. While networking remains the top source for learning about new job opportunities, it is also the top source for business development, resource referrals, vendor selection, market data, and industry trends, as well as a source of relevant information for your business and personal career.

Let me share some tried and true networking tips that I learned many years ago from one of my mentors, Bob Gatti, that remain as compelling and relevant as we start the year 2013.

Ten Tips for Successful Networking:

## **1. Identify specific target markets**

Focus in on the influential people you should meet and begin the process of building and nurturing relationships. Identify segments of your market to focus and get the most rewards. You may decide to break your targets down by level, specialty, geography, industry and/or a variety of other factors. The important thing is to have a plan – begin to narrow down to 2-3 specific targets to get started.

## **2. Know your marketplace**

Be well read. Stay on top of current practices, trends, new businesses and resources. Belong to and attend professional association meetings, seminars, conferences, and networking events where you can be educated on the most recent developments and challenges. Read the appropriate trade journals, periodicals, newspapers, and websites that make you aware of up-to-the-minute changes in your field, as well as your competition and lowers the risk of encountering surprises.

## **3. Be visible and "in play"**

Put yourself in a position to meet people. Network internally within your organization, and externally within your industry. Attend business meetings, professional associations, trade shows, college alumni gatherings, etc. Take an active role within your professional and personal community. Many people make the mistake of putting their heads down, doing their job and say, "I don't have time to network." The truth

is you have to discipline yourself to meet with the right people in order to be more effective in your job and the only way to do that is to put yourself in a position to meet people.

#### **4. Become the source of relevant information**

Build a reputation of expertise and sought-after resource. Keep your skills and competencies current. Take courses, attend seminars and workshops. As you develop a following as a content expert, people will be contacting you, hoping to build a relationship with you, and thus putting you in a position to be viewed as a trusted authority. Building a name for yourself is a prestigious role to earn. Having this kind of wisdom and experience speaks volume for any professional.

#### **5. Always give something back to your profession and community**

Not only does it make you feel good as a decent human being but it also brings you indirect rewards and benefits that you never expect. People remember acts of kindness and good will. They are then inclined to return the favor as well as serve as a source of referrals and praise for you. Do not expect anything in return, however. There are many ways to give back to your profession and community – you pick the ways that bring you most joy.

#### **6. Practice networking etiquette**

Remember, it's a two-way street. It's a constant give and take. Whenever you are networking, it should always be a partnership that is viewed as mutually beneficial. Both sides should regard the relationship as a rewarding one. One person should not always be the recipient. On the flip side, do not forget the people that helped you when you needed their assistance. Even if they don't reach out to you for any kind of help, initiate ways you can be of help to them as a way of thanking them.

#### **7. Maintain your shelf life**

Create a track record full of accomplishments and market them appropriately. As you build your portfolio, it is easier to reflect on your history of success. People look for specific accomplishments and contributions as a way to differentiate themselves in the marketplace. Build substance not fluff.

#### **8. Create a networking database**

Make it formal and be disciplined about expanding and maintaining it. There are so many options now with social media and software packages to assist you. In this world of sophisticated technologies, it is vital to have your own detailed database that includes *all* of your contacts. The accuracy of your database will be a key reflection of your success as a "seasoned networker." Update it regularly and create logs of all conversations with repetitive flags for follow up. Make it a priority!

#### **9. Have a clear, brief message to deliver**

Be sure to have a crisp message that will gain people's attention and interest. Keep in mind that professionals in every line of work are getting inundated with emails and phone calls every day from people trying to sell them one service or another. Why should they listen to you, much less be motivated to engage in a conversation or meeting? Make your message clear and brief, outlining a mutual bond that will grab their attention. Be friendly, outgoing and positive. An upbeat and enthusiastic style is always enticing and contagious. You can refine your message and develop slightly different messages for different audiences. Always be prepared and do your homework prior to engaging in a conversation. Most importantly, be genuine - show your conviction and passion.

#### **10. Don't ever stop!**

Gain and sustain momentum. Most people make the mistake of running hot and cold with their networking efforts. They only work at it in when they can, when they need something, or when things are slow. The best results are achieved when you make it a priority, are disciplined, and have a plan. Set realistic goals for yourself and make yourself accountable to execute them. Use a formal system for follow-up to keep you on track with specific timelines. Once you have a formal system set up for yourself, it is like second nature and is worked into the day-to-day pieces of your job and life. You see the results and reap the rewards. *Happy Networking!*

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