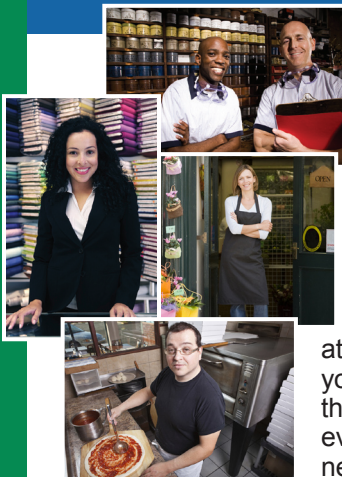


Networking Done Right Leads to Long-term Relationships

By Steve Kaufman • Marketing Communications Consultant



The three R's of PR (reputation, relationships and referrals) are extremely important for every organization. That second R (relationships) often starts with getting involved in an industry, business or civic group.

But if you're the type of person who gets shy and dreads attending networking events, relax; you're *not* alone. Many overcome this fear and prove it's possible for even the most introverted to form new relationships.

And it's worth it. Simply stated, relationships you grow via networking help expand and secure the longevity of your business. Start by following these simple pointers:

- **Pick a group you're interested in.** You'll find every excuse available NOT to attend a group's networking event if you're truly not interested in its mission or membership. Business contacts are made in every type of organization, not just "chamber" groups, so if you're really not interested in the more business-focused gatherings, consider charitable, religious or civic involvement.
- **Prepare yourself.** Think of ice-breaker questions and points you might get asked before the event, so you can prepare your answers. Consider topics, recent events, or industry news you'd like to highlight when talking to a prospect. These few guides will help fill the inevitable, sometimes awkward, silences.
- **Spread out.** Don't sit with close friends, people you already know or colleagues. Keep in mind many people at these events don't know anyone either and will be happy to make conversation with you.
- **Adjust your body language.** When you're talking to someone, face them at an angle so you're able to see the rest of the room. This welcoming body

language allows others to join in on the conversation.

- **Never discuss private matters.** Private and specific business discussions should be conducted outside networking events. Including these topics prevents people from joining in, and quite frankly, isn't appropriate. If you're caught in the situation where someone is trying to start a private conversation with *you*, the best idea is to let them know you'd like to discuss it at another time.
- **Ask questions you want to be asked.** Sometimes people need help starting a conversation. By asking questions you want to be asked, people often return their answers with "How about you?" which gives *you* the opportunity to talk about your business without seeming pushy.
- **Passing out business cards is not a contest.** People are more likely to remember your face and the conversation you held with them than your business card. By all means, pass them out as you conduct these introductions, but the goal should be quality of these, not quantity.
- **Follow up.** A quick post-event Email tells prospects and potential referral sources they're remembered and appreciated.

Networking (and relationship-building, in general) takes time, but done correctly, it's time well-spent. Networking events are a great way to give and receive referrals, maintain your visibility, and grow within the local business community.

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