

## The Nuances of Networking

Mention the word networking and you usually either get a “where and when” response or a look of “not me!” For the latter, a networking event may be synonymous with a root canal. But it doesn’t have to be painful. Unlike things like parenting, which you learn only when you become one, you can learn how to network.

To start off, rather than looking at networking as something you “must do”, it helps to think of it as a tool to help you grow business. That is, actually, what it is. It’s meeting people.... talking, sharing, discussing. It’s not going to a function where you know you’ll be uncomfortable and passing out all of your business cards. Nor is it seeing how many cards you can collect.

So let’s simplify it. Let’s take networking and break it down to its basic components..or what I’m calling nuances.

1. Networking is about meeting new people and building your network.

It’s not blatant selling. In fact, the “in your face” salespeople are not good networkers. They turn people off.

2. Lighten up.

Stop thinking of a networking event as something you’re forced to get through. Instead, think of it as a chance to meet interesting people in a comfortable environment with good food and drink. Take some of the pressure off.

3. You’re not being graded on this.

People are not there to see whether you’re doing a good job or not. They don’t care. Networking events present opportunities to build your network. Period.

4. Learn from the pros.

There are people who love to network and do it regularly. You probably know some. They write books and newsletters. They build websites on networking. Visit their websites and read their books.

5. Feign interest, if necessary, until you feel it.

Twelve step groups teach you to “act as if...” Try it. Act as if you’re enjoying yourself and you may find that you are. Sometimes it’s just getting over the fear of something new.

6. Think of what you have to gain versus what you have to lose.

If networking didn’t work, why would there be so many networking events? Things don’t succeed if they’re failing. There must be something to gain if so many people are attending these functions.

7. How are you building your business?

100% of my business comes either from client referrals or networking. It’s a lot cheaper than placing ads or running commercials. All you need are business cards. You don’t even have to hire anyone.... although if you do hire salespeople, you’ll want to make sure they can network as part of the job.

8. Networking adds value.

How? Because growing your network helps your customers. And being able to help your customers adds value to your services. The more people you know, the more contacts you have for services and goods. This helps you become a resource for your customers and colleagues. My clients know they can call me for just about anything, and I'll probably be able to help them. If I didn't network, there'd be no way to do this.

9. Networking helps you learn and grow.

Small business owners, especially, can become isolated. It's important to stay active in your business community and in your industry. You need to be current on what's going on that affects your business. You need to stay on top of trends. And one of the easiest ways to do this is by networking...joining organizations, chambers of commerce, networking groups...attending events, lectures, seminars and workshops.

So, if you've been avoiding networking, now's as good a time as any to give it a try. You have nothing to lose and a lot of potential business to gain.

