

10 Tips for Successful Business Networking

by Stephanie Speisman

Effective business networking is the linking together of individuals who, through trust and relationship building, become walking, talking advertisements for one another.

1. **Keep in mind that networking is about being genuine** and authentic, building trust and relationships, and seeing how you can help others.
2. **Ask yourself what your goals are in participating in networking meetings** so that you will pick groups that will help you get what you are looking for. Some meetings are based more on learning, making contacts, and/or volunteering rather than on strictly making business connections.
3. **Visit as many groups as possible that spark your interest.** Notice the tone and attitude of the group. Do the people sound supportive of one another? Does the leadership appear competent? Many groups will allow you to visit two times before joining.
4. **Hold volunteer positions in organizations.** This is a great way to stay visible and give back to groups that have helped you.
5. **Ask open-ended questions in networking conversations.** This means questions that ask who, what, where, when, and how as opposed to those that can be answered with a simple yes or no. This form of questioning opens up the discussion and shows listeners that you are interested in them.
6. **Become known as a powerful resource for others.** When you are known as a strong resource, people remember to turn to you for suggestions, ideas, names of other people, etc. This keeps you visible to them.
7. **Have a clear understanding of what you do and why, for whom, and what makes your doing it special** or different from others doing the same thing. In order to get referrals, you must first have a clear understanding of what you do that you can easily articulate to others.
8. **Be able to articulate what you are looking for and how others may help you.** Too often people in conversations ask, "How may I help you?" and no immediate answer comes to mind.
9. **Follow through quickly and efficiently on referrals you are given.** When people give you referrals, your actions are a reflection on them. Respect and honor that and your referrals will grow.
10. **Call those you meet who may benefit from what you do and vice versa.** Express that you enjoyed meeting them, and ask if you could get together and share ideas.

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Preparing Your Elevator Speech

An 'elevator speech' is a term taken from the early days of the internet explosion when web development companies needed venture capital. Finance firms were swamped with applications for money and the companies that won the cash were often those with a simple pitch. The best were those that could explain a business proposition to the occupants of an elevator in the time it took them to ride to their floor. In other words, an elevator speech that worked was able to describe and sell an idea in 30 seconds or less. Today, an 'elevator speech can be any kind of short speech that sells an idea, promotes your business or markets you as an individual.

An elevator speech is as essential as a business card. You need to be able to say who you are, what you do, what you are interested in doing and how you can be a resource to your listeners. If you don't have an elevator speech, people won't know what you really do.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE- Before writing any part of your elevator speech, research your audience. You will be much more likely to succeed if your elevator speech is clearly targeted at the individuals you are speaking to. Having a 'generic' elevator pitch is almost certain to fail.

KNOW YOURSELF - Before you can convince anyone of your proposition you need to know exactly what it is. You need to define precisely what you are offering, what problems you can solve and what benefits you bring to a prospective contact or employers

Answer the following questions:

1. What are your key strengths?
2. What adjectives come to mind to describe you?
3. What is it you are trying to 'sell' or let others know about you?
4. Why are you interested in the company or industry the person represents?

OUTLINE YOUR TALK - start an outline of your material using bullet points. You don't need to add any detail at this stage; simply write a few notes to help remind you of what you really want to say. They don't need to be complete sentences.

You can use the following questions to start your outline:

1. Who am I?
2. What do I offer?
3. What problem is solved?
4. What are the main contributions I can make?
5. What should the listener do as a result of hearing this?

FINALIZE YOUR SPEECH - Now that you have your outline of your material, you can finalize the speech. The key to doing this is to expand on the notes you made by writing out each section in full.

To help you do this, follow these guidelines:

1. Take each note you made and write a sentence about it.
2. Take each of the sentences and connect them together with additional phrases to make them flow.
3. Go through what you have written and change any long words or jargon into everyday language.
4. Go back through the re-written material and cut out unnecessary words.
5. Finalize your speech by making sure it is no more than 90 words long.