

Ready, Set, Network!

by Helen Kornblum

Building a business requires a networking toolkit that consists of your business identity and techniques for good communication.

- * Always have lots of business cards handy. Take more cards than you think you could distribute and keep a box in your car so you can take advantage of unexpected networking opportunities.
- * You can find a good business card design from web sources, but a graphic designer can create a logo that truly reflects your brand. Avoid the temptation to put too much information on the card. Don't print on the back of the card because you will want to make notes when you're networking.
- * Prepare a clear name tag to wear on your right lapel so it's in the line of sight when you shake hands. Put your business name on the top in large letters and then your name underneath, in slightly smaller letters.
- * Keep your hands free when you network. Men have pockets in their clothes so juggling business cards isn't too hard. Women can wear a light shoulder purse rather than carry a big, awkward purse. Have your cards and a pen available so you're not fumbling when you need to concentrate on the conversation. Keep *your* cards separated from cards you collect
- * Don't forget to smile no matter how uncomfortable you may feel in a networking situation. Many of us are uncomfortable with the uncertainties and awkwardness of initiating conversations with people we don't know. The more you practice, the more relaxed you will be just talking with anyone in your environment. After a while, promoting yourself will not seem embarrassing or unpleasant.
- * Prepare a memorable "elevator speech"—a concise and lively explanation of your business that will tell people exactly what you do.
- * Be prepared to listen attentively when others give their elevator speech. You are listening for conversational clues to areas of mutual interest with the other person. Don't confuse networking with selling. Networking is a reciprocal process in which each person gives and receives information that can be mutually beneficial.
- * If the other person hasn't given you enough information on which to build a conversation, ask him or her to give you an example or explanation of what has been said. Your questions will draw forth information that you can use to create a connection between you and your networking partner.
- * Don't hold back on giving out information based on your expertise that can help another person. The more you give of yourself, the more likely you will receive similar

consideration from others. Generosity of spirit says a lot about who you are and makes you a desirable business contact. Sharing information helps to build your credibility quickly.

* Your mental involvement should be reflected in your physical behavior. Good listening includes direct eye contact, some physical feedback such as a nod or a smile, and verbal affirmation with comments or questions.

Remember that networking is an ongoing, continuous process, a mindset that makes us generous and more likely to establish a real connection with others who can help us. Whether you realize it or not, you are networking all day long, representing yourself and your business as an individual worthy of consideration. Similarly, you take the measure of people whom you meet in all kinds of circumstances. Remain open to interactions with others. It will be good for you and for your business in the short term as well as the long term.

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