

The Seven Habits of Highly Successful Networkers

All business people are networkers whether they realize it or not. Some are more effective than others and enjoy it more than others. Anyone can master the art of networking with a bit of effort and a little magic.

Think about it. Every time you meet someone, you are networking. Every time you greet someone, you are networking. Every time you pick up the phone, you are networking. Every time you send an e-mail, you are networking. Every time you engage someone in conversation, you are networking. Every time you write a note (yes, some people still write notes), you are networking.

You don't have to attend a community function, an afterhours reception, a fundraising event or an educational conference to network. Unless you are like Robinson Crusoe or Tom Hanks stranded on a desert island, you are constantly networking.

Some people do it with deliberation and others wander aimlessly through the process. The most successful business people are the ones who do it with purpose. The result of intentional networking is greater profits and increased business.

If you want to become a more effective at connecting with people, consider these seven habits of highly effective networkers:

Habit #1 Knowing what networking is.

You can't be successful at networking if you don't understand what it is. Surprisingly, many people have the wrong idea about it. Before you can begin, you should have a clear idea of what networking is not.

Networking is not about being pushy or aggressive. It is not selfish and one-sided. It is not about who can collect the most business cards or who can shake the most hands. It is not about job-hunting or attracting more people to become your customers. It is not about how many "friends" you have on Facebook or how many connections you have on LinkedIn.

Networking is about who you know. The more people you know and the greater the diversity there is in your contact base, the more successful you will be

Networking is about who knows what you need to know. Effective networkers have relationships with people who have the expertise and experience to help them achieve their goals.

Networking is about what you know. What is your expertise and your unique skill? If you are not clear on what you have to offer or what it is you do, neither will anyone else.

Most importantly, networking is about making sure that others know that you know what you know. How visible are you and how many people know what your area of expertise is? When people know that you know what you know, you become the expert and the "to-go-to" person. It is a lot easier to have people come to you than having to chase them down.

As an effective networker, you should create a broad base of people with whom you are connected and your relationship with your network should benefit you and those whom you know.

Habit #2 Developing a networking strategy

Savvy networkers have a strategy. Before they attend any event or engage in any opportunity, they consider the basics of why, what, who and how. Why are they networking? What do they hope to accomplish? Who will they be exposed to? How can they help those whom they will meet and how will the relationships they develop be mutually beneficial?

Habit #3 Finding the right venue

The sheer number of networking opportunities can be overwhelming so smart networkers choose their venues. They do so based on any number of factors. Date, time and place are just three to consider. If you are not a morning person, breakfast groups may not be your thing. If you don't like mixing and mingling at cocktail parties, find another event. It is more productive to seek organizations with activities you enjoy at a time of day that works for you. Keep in mind that all networking does not have to be work-related. You can make valuable connections with like-minded people anywhere.

Habit #4 Preparing for and working events

Once the decision has been made to attend an event or join an organization, the clever networkers do their home work. If there is an event to attend, why is it being held? Who will be there? What will people most likely want to talk about? What is the attire? Showing up in inappropriate attire can make a person stand out from the crowd for all the wrong reasons.

Habit #5 Mastering the art of conversation

Showing up at events is a waste of time if you can't make small talk with people once you arrive. To avoid finding yourself at a loss for words, prepare at least three topics that you can talk about when no one knows what to say. Keep in mind that 80% of conversation is listening and 20% is talking. Have open-ended questions ready to get others to talk to you and pay attention to the answers so you can keep the conversation moving.

Habit #6 Following up and following through

Follow up turns people you have met into people you know. Think of ways to stay connected. Some of those ways are as simple as writing a note, sending people information that relates to their expertise or interests, inviting them to join you for a cup of coffee or possibly meet you for lunch. If your parting words were "Let's get together sometime," do it. The Golden Rule of networking is to do what you say you will. If you don't, you have wasted an opportunity and will forever be remembered as insincere.

Habit #7 Practicing exceptional business etiquette skills from start to finish

If nothing else, effective networkers practice good manners. That's the magic of networking. Successful networkers make others feel valued by focusing attention on them. They listen and respond to what is being said. They don't look over the other person's shoulder to see whom they can talk to next. They put people at ease with their etiquette skills by making introductions and

including others in the conversation. When the time comes to move on, the polite networker has graceful exit lines already prepared. A good closure is, "I have enjoyed our conversation. I hate to end it but I feel that I have monopolized your time. I know that there are other people here whom you'd like to talk to."

By exhibiting the best in business etiquette skills, the effective networker is a person that others will seek out in the future whether it is for information, help with an issue or to offer an opportunity. There has never been any doubt that people want to be in the company of and to do business with people they like. Everyone likes the person who puts them at ease and makes them feel comfortable.

Have you developed the seven habits of a highly effective networker in order to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with a wide range of people? Have you polished your business etiquette skills so that you are the person whose company others seek? If you haven't, start now. It's never too late to hone your people skills, build your network and practice networking magic.

About The Author

Lydia Ramsey is an international business etiquette expert, speaker, trainer and author of numerous books, including the widely-acclaimed ***Manners That Sell – Adding The Polish That Builds Profits***. She has been quoted or featured in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Investors' Business Daily, Entrepreneur, Inc., Real Simple, Woman's Day Men's Health, Men's Fitness and Golf Digest.