



9 Tips To Make Networking Work For You

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NETWORKING: *the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions; specifically, the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business.* (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

REAL LIFE NETWORKING: *Meeting and connecting people anywhere through any technology on a genuine level to grow business and build communities that can change the world.* (Christy Smallwood definition)

For generations sales professionals, entrepreneurs, business owners, community leaders and others have used networking to grow business and accomplish great things for the world. How are YOU doing with the activity of networking? Does networking work for you? Do you know how to make a strong networking strategy?

When I first started going to networking functions I had a vision of what it might be like - a big room full of people talking at tables set for lunch and a speaker to occupy the time. I knew making connections was the goal, but I had the foggiest idea how to turn that new connection into a paying client without being pushy. The only real advice I had received at that point was, "People want to do business with people they like" - "collect as many cards as you can" - and "sell everybody." I quickly learned that's not what it's really about.

To keep this short and sweet, here are 9 tips to make networking work for you.

1. Have the right mindset.

The basic purpose of networking is to build your network of people. When you set out to network, remember these people are future clients, strategic partners, and friends. Not a transaction. Think friends first. Friends will have your back and want you to succeed. Friends will keep you top of mind when talking with others about a need they have you can meet. Friends bring quality referrals. Building friendships take time and effort.

2. Commit to consistency.

There are plenty of official networking events every day. Some are Chambers of Commerce, some are lead referral groups, some are associations, and some are niche groups that get together because they like the same thing - like bourbon or golf or books or whatever. Pick one or two groups to join and be consistent in attending. Meet with each member of the group outside the meeting to build the friendships and strategic partnership, even possible clients. Attending only one time does not build a relationship of trust enough to do business together. Consistency pays off.

3. Have a goal.

Since we are networking for people and not transactions, decide how many and what kind of people you want to add to your network. Do you want people who are in your industry? Are they in a different kind of business but share your client? are they local or from anywhere in the world? How many people can you add and still follow-up in a quality fashion? Have a goal when intentionally networking. Who are you looking for and what do you want to accomplish with them?

4. Know your ideal client.

Marketing 101. Who is your ideal client? To know that, you need to know your data. Who is coming to you most? What challenges do they have that you help overcome? How much do they spend with you? How often do they come to you? What do they look like? Male or female? How old are they? Where do they live? What activities do they enjoy? What do they read? What shows do they watch? What is their favorite restaurant? Do they have kids? What is their profession? And a blue-million other questions could be asked that helps form an accurate picture of your ideal client. Start with 25 questions of things that are helpful to know about your client. Have such a clear picture of your ideal client that you could instantly see them in the crowd because you have their picture hanging on your wall. They're already like family to you.

5. It happens anywhere.

Anywhere there is people gathered, it's an opportunity to network. Yes, even at the grocery, church, sporting events, parks, book stores, historical sites, etc. Are you seeing opportunity to network wherever you go? If not, you could be missing out. Your ideal client could be waiting in the same restaurant lobby.

6. It's marketing, not sales, yet.

Remember back to #1 - these are people, not transactions. You're in marketing mode, not sales. What is your presentation? Not just the words to describe what you do, but how do you present yourself? Ettiquette, professionalism, conversation, attire, behavior, etc. All of it matters when meeting new people. Making first impressions, deciding if you like chatting with each other, do you feel like you want to have further conversation about business? Define your complete presentation and that is not just the Power Point presentation.

7. The introduction - it's NOT an elevator pitch.

How do you introduce yourself to others? If you are using the same 30-second commercial over-and-over you are losing the opportunity to create real conversation. The only time an elevator pitch is needed is in the elevator with your ideal client. Otherwise, the goal should be creating a conversation that allows the two of you to determine if you want to do business together. By immediately giving them the box to put you in through a "pitch" you are encouraging choppy stiff conversation. Instead, keep the "what you do" portion short and sweet and pertaining to how you help people, then ask what they do. Then ask more about what they do. And ask more questions - in a genuine manner. When you are genuinely curious about them, and keep the conversation on them, YOU get to discover more about them. They really like you because you've allowed them to talk about their favorite subject, and you can discover if what you have to offer will actually benefit them or not. If so, schedule a more official conversation. If not, develop that friendship so they will keep you top of mind. The pace and structure of the conversation is just as important as making sure you don't smell bad. If your conversation is stinky, don't expect an opportunity to develop.

8. Everyone either IS or KNOWS your ideal client.

Everyone in your network is valuable. You get to decide where they fit. Are they your ideal client? If not - they probably KNOW your ideal client. There's rarely a time that it's necessary to not allow someone in your network. I've had great referrals from people who have never used my service, but they knew my future client.

9. Take Action.

None of these tips matter if you don't put them into action. Networking doesn't work unless you are actively meeting new people, consistently investing time into your network, and developing quality relationships that grow your business for the long-term.

It's about relationship. And it's a lifestyle. It's the long-term investment into your business. I am more aware and intentional with my relationships. I've created a lot of business opportunities. I've developed amazing new friendships, shared faith and values, and never squandered one moment. It's taking an authentic approach to the business of people (the same people who buy your products and services).

My network of people is priceless to me. Not only has there been some great business moments, but also community growth and professional recognition. In addition, I have attended almost every kind of networking function both in-person and on-line. The opportunities to meet other entrepreneurs is endless. There is no longer any excuse to

not growing a business through developing relationships, and using tools to be efficient and effective with efforts.

No matter where you are networking - at an official networking event, on-line through different platforms, or even at the amusement park - using these tips will help strengthen your approach and make your efforts pay off for quality business growth.

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Christy Smallwood

Christy Smallwood's background includes 20+ years in media, marketing and advertising, plus organizational management with focus on developing and launching new projects. Christy is a trained executive coach specializing in leadership communication. Her experience covers a variety of industries: ad agency, radio, franchises, small business, corporate and ministry/nonprofits.

Christy uses her gifts of bringing order to chaos, getting thing done, and motivating people to realize their potential, reach their goals, and bring their dreams to life. She specializes in training on self-awareness and self-definition that includes leadership, emotional intelligence, marketing, organization, personal development and time management. She trains and develops entrepreneurs to continuous growth through strategies that fit their passions and beliefs. Christy has worked with over 100 local professionals through direct coaching and training, and reached thousands through speaking at workshops and various organizations' events across the country.

Christy's passion to help others motivated her to write *Networking: The Meaningful Marketing Method*, a fun and easy read about how to make your business networking efforts more effective. It will help you build successful and long-lasting people connections. Her second book, *Being Super*, will help you engage your inner hero while you accomplish your big goals.

To Pre-Order these books, contact Christy.

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