

How to Become a Power Networker: Part Three

by Carol Dunitz, Ph.D.

After the party is over is when the real work begins. Networking is not just about warm smiles, pressing flesh, and having fun. It is about establishing symbiotic relationships with people. You can't establish relationships if you don't take the next step. The next step goes on as long as you are in business.

Follow Up and Follow Through. After you meet someone, follow-up with an e-mail or handwritten note. If you have ever received a handwritten note, you know how terrific it feels. It makes a lasting impression.

Writing thank-you notes is an art that has gone by the wayside in the era of sloppily constructed e-mail and fast food lunch. Be sure to write thank you notes to those who go out of their way to help you. It takes so little time and is really appreciated by the receiver. Acknowledge people who have helped you and they will be pleased to help you again when the need arises. It is a natural way to facilitate the building of long-term relationships.

Receive a referral? Send a thank-you note or send a gift. Tell someone you are going to call or e-mail them? Don't let time get away from you. Do it right away.

Stay in touch with old friends and new acquaintances to build relationships through which you can help others and reap benefits yourself. Stay in touch with everyone you know. You never know who might be the next person to refer business or help you with some other area in your life.

Following up and following through is what networking is about. Making an initial contact means nothing if you don't move ahead to establish a relationship that is mutually beneficial.

Be Ethical. Behave in ways that are consistent with networking ethics. Treat others the way you like to be treated. Be open-minded. Keep promises. Never make anyone feel small when they ask for or receive help from you.

Give to others without counting the times. Thank others warmly when they help you. Make a habit of smiling and extending a helping hand. You'll always feel good about yourself and you will spread a great deal of joy.

Maintain a Networking Database. Once the rolodex was the networker's invaluable reference. Today it is more likely to be a computer database. Whatever name it goes by, your list of contacts should be filled with a record for each person you know. If you make notes after meetings while your memory is still fresh you can include all sorts of helpful information in the record which will be a boon to refer to in the future.

Set aside some time every week to maintain regular contact with people. Keep yourself uppermost in their mind. They may have opportunities to send business your way.

Leverage Your Networking by Volunteering. Volunteering is a great way to meet people. If you are struggling with shyness, volunteer to help with registration or other meeting tasks. It gives you a built in reason to talk with others.

Consider volunteering for charitable or philanthropic causes that are close to your heart. Support them in your community by working on committees and volunteering for events. Chances are good you will find yourself on a nonprofit board in no time. Not only will you be making a difference, you will be catapulting yourself to a new level of networking that has the potential to open doors and drive business.

Reach Out. Extend yourself beyond your circle of comfort. Sure, it's extra tough the first time but you'll find it gets easier each subsequent time you do it. Do you ever see someone else who looks uncomfortable and is standing alone. Approach them. You'll be doing a good deed that helps you both. Next try walking up to someone who appears very different from you. Introduce yourself and then start asking some questions in an effort to find something you share in common. It won't take long to find a hobby you both have, a team you both cheer for, a place you both like to visit. With so much success under your belt you can move forward and approach someone who you've been wanting to meet. Be friendly and self-assured. You're on your way to becoming a networking maven.

Use Conversation Starters Happily. Find a way to stand out from the crowd. Do you have a special color you usually dress in? A piece of jewelry that attracts attention and remarks? Do you use a highlighter to make a yellow streak across your name on your name tag? These are all conversation starters and part of your own personal marketing theme. Be unconventional but not over the edge. Your distinctive identity will bring positive attention your way which will inevitably translate into work.

Become an expert at small talk by staying abreast of current affairs, the daily news, business news, hot topics and trends. People will gravitate to you.

Develop Networking Skills. Don't attend events. Participate in them. Don't spend most of your time with people you already know. Spend it meeting those you've never met. Don't count the number of business cards you hand out. Count the seeds you plant that have potential to germinate over time.

Play the host. Greet people as they enter and thank them for attending as they leave. Put on your winningest smile. Make eye contact and extend your arm to shake hands. Listen to people when you talk with them. Ask open-ended questions and respond with warmth and enthusiasm when they are answered. Build rapport. And have a memorable exit strategy -- the best one being introducing other people you've met to people you are talking to.

Make it fun for yourself. And have patience. Getting new business takes time. Stay with the program.

Pay Attention to Body Language. Dress for success. Hair, makeup, nails. Always pay attention to how you look.

Sport good body language. Be relaxed and open. Mirror the posture of the people you are talking to. Stay focused on them, listening intently and showing your interest in them -- not to who else might walk into the room.

Limit how much you eat and drink at an event. Too much alcohol consumption can make a bad impression.

Network to Find Jobs. What's the fastest way to find a job? Not through the classified ads. Not from the online databases. A New York Times survey (2002) found that only 11 percent of people find jobs through advertisements! What does that mean for you? It means the odds are with you if you have honed and are using your networking skills. Sixty-four percent of people find jobs through networking. If you are job hunting that means you should get the word out to your circle of influence. You need to attend conferences and trade shows, small groups and large meetings. Stay connected. Your persistence will pay off.

Networking is a way of life. Effective networkers don't wait until they need something to network. They network forever and always to ensure they have the resources they need when they need them. That being said, great networkers are not in the game simply to get others to help them. They're there to make friends, develop relationships, and assist others. They put others ahead of themselves and recognize that getting the assistance of others comes as a result of living your life in a giving and generous way.

Carol Dunitz, Ph.D. is president of The Last Word LLC, a communication and creative services company. She is a professional speaker and author of 'Louder Than Thunder,' a parable about listening and interpersonal communication. Dunitz is the playwright, lyricist and composer of 'Bernhardt on Broadway,' a musical about Sarah Bernhardt. She can be reached at 312.523.4774, cdunitz@lastword.com or www.DrCarolDunitz.com.