



Make Networking Work for You

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From “Notworking” to Networking

Looking for a job? Need some personal advice? Looking to make some new connections? Perhaps you should try networking. But consider networking only if you are prepared to help others first. Otherwise, your efforts will fall short.

Unfortunately, some take the position that “doing everything” is better than “doing less.” They treat networking like a game of bumper cars in which progress is measured by the number of people that they run into rather than the quality of the underlying relationships created. Simply put, handing out more business cards at a meeting or adding more friends to Facebook or LinkedIn is “notworking.”

Others treat networking like a personal marketing campaign dedicated to spreading the word about themselves and their needs, while ignoring the needs of their peers. This “me-first thinking” not only will not work but is actually counterproductive.

Still other people join affinity groups merely for personal gain, but it doesn’t take long for people to learn that these folks are not givers, but takers. These “notworkers” don’t understand the importance of building long-lasting relationships; instead, they’ll reach out to others only when they need something. And then they’re surprised when their requests produce little.

Successful networking occurs when people come together based on mutual respect and common interests, then voluntarily provide support for others with no strings attached. They believe that by helping others, they’ll eventually end up helping themselves.

By Invitation Only

People seldom realize that the actual makeup of their

networks (some based on close relationships, others derived from casual relationships) serves very different and important purposes. Understanding these differences is key to having a more productive network.

For example, when networking with “like people,” it’s easier to ask them what they would do if they were in your shoes — they understand what makes you tick and they travel in similar circles. These close relationships, however, require additional time and effort, meaning that you can develop only so many strong ties.

On the other hand, people don’t expect the same level of time and effort in casual relationships. These relationships serve as bridges to a community of new people, offer greater objectivity, and may provide an entirely different perspective.

How to Make Networking Work?

To be part of a successful network, it’s important to follow a few basic rules.

1. Don’t wait until you desperately need a network to begin developing one (for example, looking for a new job). Networks are based on trust, respect, and personal chemistry — that doesn’t happen overnight.
2. Join a social network or an industry or professional association to add structure to your professional relationships while expanding your network.
3. Know your personal strengths and the strengths of each member of your network. This information will come in very handy in helping others. (For example, who understands technology? Who knows something about buying a car? Who knows the inside scoop about applying to college? Who knows the most about New York City nightlife? Who has friends in high places? Who can comment on a resume?)

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Who can advise on interviewing skills?) This will enable you to identify the best person in your network to help a friend.

4. If you join a group (such as a trade association), get involved rather than sitting on the sidelines. You receive only as much as you are willing to give.

5. Group get-togethers are not substitutes for one-on-one meetings. Large gatherings tend to have “fixed agendas,” making it difficult for members to open up personally. Furthermore, a few members may dominate discussions in large groups.

6. Networks expand and contract. Keep in touch with members of your network on a regular basis or you’ll drift apart. (Birthday and holiday greetings, or congratulatory notes, require only a few minutes of your time and will be remembered.)

7. Networking offers unbelievable potential. For example, in today’s tough job market, what do you think would be more effective — blindly responding to available positions by sending out hundreds of resumes or getting an informal introduction from a colleague in your network? Take the time to nurture your network. It can change your life!

The Give and Take of Building Lasting Relationships

- Make the first move in the relationship. Be a giver not a taker.
- First, satisfy a request...then feel free to do more.
- Only make promises you can deliver on. Managing expectations is key.
- Like gift giving, give people what they want, not what you want them to have.
- If you can’t fulfill a request, the next best alternative is to recommend someone from your network who can help.
- Evaluate the reasonableness of your requests. (Never pressure someone who seems uncomfortable with a request you’ve made.)
- Use people’s time wisely. Know what you want before making a request.
- Be specific. If you’re vague, you may end up getting something that you don’t need or want.
- Respect people’s priorities. They may have a lot on their plate. Be understanding if they can’t help you right away.
- When someone introduces you to a colleague in their network, make them “look good.” Their reputation is on the line. Furthermore, keep your friend in the loop. Communicate your progress or the results that occur.
- Never take someone’s good nature for granted; a thank-you is always required.

Networking Etiquette

- Don’t keep score. Just because you performed a favor doesn’t guarantee one in return.
- On the other hand, networking should be give-and-take to some extent. If you do too much for someone without accepting something in return, you’re implying that they don’t have anything to offer.
- When you do someone a favor, don’t make a big deal out of it. Do it because you want to help, or don’t do it at all.
- Don’t push yourself on people. They’ll ask for assistance if they need it.
- Don’t show off by proving how much you know about a subject when a quick answer will suffice.
- Make sure you are contacting people at a convenient time. (Some prefer to be contacted at work, others at home.)
- Do not become too reliant on any one individual. You can destroy a relationship by taking advantage of someone’s good nature.
- Be considerate when making requests of others. Don’t ask for sensitive information, be aware of the costs of your request — in both time and money, and make sure your requests are ethical and reasonable.
- When people come to you with problems they have labored over for weeks, don’t solve these problems for them in seconds. Doing so may make them feel inferior. Better yet, ask questions that help them solve the problems themselves.
- When someone trusts you with sensitive information, maintain its privacy or be prepared to lose that person’s trust.
- Do not judge other people’s requests. What might seem foolish to you may be important to them.

Those who are successful at networking will tell you that its potential is unlimited. It only stands to reason that the people who benefit most are the “givers” — those who go all-out to help others — rather than the “takers” — those who are merely out for personal gain. The best networkers have learned that, as with anything in life, what goes around, comes around. How about you? Are you a networker, or a “notworker”? ●

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