

The Give-and-Take in Networking

7.25.11

Think of networking as a sport. How well do you play the game? Build a plan to become an AllStar, generating new business for your company

When it comes to sharing leads with other people, I think I'm pretty generous. It sometimes feels that I'm giving more than I'm receiving. I know that the networking premise is, I'll scratch your back, you scratch mine : but will it happen? I don't want to just presume that people will send business opportunities my way, I want to make it happen.

Make introductions purposefully, and ask that others do the same. Be curious. Promptly follow up on leads that come your way. Be sure to hang out in places that are likely to be rewarding.

Purposeful connecting is a way of business for some people. They thrive on making introductions, exploring opportunities. Their world, and the worlds of the people around them, expand because of it.

Think about the introductions you are about to make. How can both parties benefit. Do they do business in the same marketplace? Do they have information that might be valuable to each other? Be intentional.

As you connect people, offer to participate. Facilitating an introduction meeting increases the chances of success. Asking participants to update you on how things proceed afterwards helps to remind everyone about the role you play in getting valuable connections off the ground.

Some people get the value of giving and getting, some people just take. In your world you want people who do both. Be aware of how the people around you behave.

Monitor what happens when you do introduce people. Do they follow up and treat the opportunities as valuable? Do they "pay it forward" with introductions of their own? If so, keep going. If not, consider focusing your efforts on more fertile ground.

Some people worry that they can't make an introduction until they're sure both parties are qualified to meet each other. If that's your concern, lighten up. If the connection is never made, it has no value. We're all grown ups, and capable of figuring out on our own if a connection is worth pursuing, or not. Stop trying to protect your connections so much, and instead seek to introduce people to a wider world of ideas and possibilities.

Give people a chance to get to know a little bit about you, as you get to know them. Make yourself memorable by asking about each person you meet. Express interest in who they are, what they do. Relate something they bring up to something in your world, then quickly turn the focus back onto them.

If you're concerned about the quality or quantity of leads coming your way, re-evaluate both your style and the places you're hanging out. Ask yourself if the networking events you're attending are populated with people who care about what you care about, and who travel in circles you want to be connected with. Regularly push yourself out of your comfort zone to attend new events, to see what else is out there. Be rigorous and disciplined about follow up.

At a business event you may be focused on exchanging business cards. Take an extra minute to note something memorable about each person you meet. That will make you seem more interested at the point of contact, and will also help you remember who each person is when you're back in the office doing follow up.

Once you're back in the office, it's follow up time. Start to explore possibilities. Send out emails and make phone calls. Request more information. By all means suggest connecting on Linked-In. Suggest face-to-face meetings to explore possibilities. Block time in your calendar weekly to meet new people.

If a friend says they want to connect you with someone, go. If you can't see the potential value in a meeting, ask your friend why they're trying to make the connection. Trust their judgment, until proven otherwise. Be open to the possibility that a connection may lead somewhere that you can't yet understand. Be prepared to put a request out during the meeting, saying both, "How can I help you?" and, "Here's what would be helpful to me."

Looking for a good book? The Go-Giver: A Little Story About a Powerful Business Idea by Bob Burg and John David Mann.

Andi Gray is president of Strategy Leaders Inc., www.StrategyLeaders.com, a business consulting firm that specializes in helping entrepreneurial firms grow. She can be reached by phone at 877-238-3535. Do you have a question for Andi? Please send it to her, via e-mail at AskAndi@StrategyLeaders.com or by mail to Andi Gray, Strategy Leaders Inc., 5 Crossways, Chappaqua, NY 10514. Visit www.AskAndi.com for an entire library of Ask Andi articles

*Business owners regularly turn to Ask Andi and Strategy Leaders for advice on how to grow profitable, successful companies. They find what they need time after time. Specific advice is available at www.AskAndi.com. Ask Andi is also published weekly in the Westchester and Fairfield County Business Journals and Hudson Valley Business. Written by Strategy Leaders President, Andi Gray, the Ask Andi column is a rich source of advice for owners of established, privately held businesses. If you are a business owner and you have a question or would like to discuss some aspect of your business, call **1.877.238.3535** or send an email to AskAndi@StrategyLeaders.com.*