

Making Connections

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Looking for suggestions on the best ways to make new connections with more business people. Have to get ready for next year's sales, and I don't have enough in my pipeline yet to be comfortable. Feel like things are turning up and people are more open to buying and making connections, but I need to meet more people fast.

Things are turning up, but slowly. It may take twice as much energy as it did in the past to build the right connections with new prospects and referral sources. It's worth mentioning that in most situations, people do business with people they know and like. How you go about making connections, and getting people to help you because they like and respect you, your firm, and what you stand for, will go a long ways towards making 2012 a banner year. Having a process for making connections will help, too.

Be prepared to be out there, more than ever. Realistically assess your situation. What time of day works best - morning, afternoon, evening? How many times per week can you go to functions. Who else could take over some of your other duties, to free you up to do more events.

Give yourself time to get ready, look over the roster of attendees, arrive early. Be prepared to be curious and enthusiastic. Offer to help other people make connections, and then ask them to do the same for you.

Set goals, such as number of events / month. Figure out how many new connections you want to make each month, as well as a goal for new appointments to talk about business. Then measure your progress towards those goals.

Look at every networking event as an opportunity - and then critically assess the opportunity. If you haven't been to a group's networking events before, before you go, ask some questions of the event organizer:

- Who typically attends? Is your target market being described?
- What kind of time and energy is devoted to making new connections?
- Who would be available to introduce you around?
- Is there a follow up system to connect attendees afterwards?
- How do people who attend rate the events?

If people are attending from the companies you want to connect with, ask another question: Are attendees in the positions you want to meet, or can they get you to those positions? For example, you may attend an IT networking function, but if you're looking to connect with Human Resources personnel, or Finance, or CEO's, you might be out of

luck. Unless, of course, you can connect with the IT folks and turn that into an introduction to the people you ultimately want to meet.

Give off a good impression of your firm. What has your company been doing lately that might be interesting to other people? How can you use the resources of your company to help other people accomplish their goals? What can you do to create good will that you can trade on later?

When you go to networking events, be clear about what you're looking to accomplish. Start out with a list specific to that event. Looking to meet one person who could tell you about . . . , introduce you to . . . , help you open a door at . . .

Use networking events to find out what makes people tick. What's important to the people you meet? What do they care about? How can you connect to that, so that you become more memorable in their world?

Be sure to follow up with you get back from the event. Send emails, make phone calls, join up on LinkedIn. If you offered to make a connection, or send information, get it done.

Think long term. If you go to 1 networking event / week throughout the year, and you get 2-3 good connections, on average, per event, you'll have 150 people added to your network. if you ask each of those 150 people to introduce you to 2-3 people, you're up over 500 introductions in no time.

Looking for a good book? Great Connections: Small Talk and Networking for Businesspeople by Anne Baber.

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