

HOW TO NETWORK AND MARKET YOURSELF

GETTING STARTED

No matter what your organizational position is, and no matter what your career goals are, you can always benefit from networking and marketing yourself. In today's world, business is driven by relationships. Networking and marketing yourself require you to build strong and meaningful relationships—many that will be long term. The following points are questions to consider as you prepare to network and to market yourself:

- * Why are you networking? What is your personal or professional goal?
- * What are your strengths that will help you to market yourself?
- * What organizations or events will be valuable places for networking?
- * How much time do you want to spend on networking, and when will you do it?
- * How will you know when you've been successful?

FAQS

Why should I bother to network and to market myself?

Research has shown that people who have a vast network of contacts, who are involved in professional and community activities outside their organizations, and who look for opportunities to be visible are more successful in their careers and contribute more effectively to their organizations.

Isn't networking the same as politicking, and won't it look bad?

Politicking is done for personal gain. Networking is done for the good of the organization or your professional field. If you are a successful networker, people are drawn to you because they know you are well connected and that you have good resources.

When is the best time to network?

Networking should become a way of life, a way of being. You should be networking all the time. As you build professional relationships, be constantly thinking: "What can I offer this person?" "How can I be of help?" The more you try to be of service to others, the more people will want to do things for you.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Clarify the Purpose of Your Networking and Why You Are Marketing Yourself

There are many reasons for networking and for marketing oneself. They can include finding a new job, seeking a promotion, or gaining support for a major project. Although it is important to continually build relationships, it is much more effective to know why you are building these relationships and what you

hope to accomplish. Everyone has limited time, and this will help you to decide how to prioritize your networking activities.

Make a List of Your Strong Points

It is important to have a sense of who you are and what your strengths are when you are networking and marketing yourself. What are your special skills and abilities? What unique knowledge do you have? What experiences will other people find valuable? What characteristics and beliefs define who you are? Once you have made this list, make copies for your bathroom mirror, for your car dashboard, and for your wallet. Knowing your strengths helps you to remember that other people will value what you have to offer.

Never network from a position of weakness. Always network from a position of strength. Have something of value to offer; otherwise people will see you as an annoyance. And remember to begin networking before you need anything from other people. Join or create a network to build relationships, and do what you can to help others or the organization.

Make a List of Organizations and Events for Networking

Identify professional organizations and events that may be helpful to you in your career or with your project. Look for special interest groups like those for “entrepreneurial women” for example. Get involved. When you are at professional events, make sure that you attend social functions, that you join people for dinner, and that you seek out volunteer opportunities. If you are networking within your own organization, find special interest groups or social groups to join. Look for committees to be involved in, and don’t be shy about asking questions and making suggestions.

If you are not sure where to begin on this step, ask for advice from a mentor, from your boss, and from trusted colleagues.

Create a Contact List

Keeping in mind your reasons for networking, brainstorm all the people you know who might be of help to you. Prioritize the list according to who is most likely to be helpful. Think about people you have done favors for in the past who might not be of direct help, but who may know someone who can be. After you have spoken to each one, ask him or her, “Who else do you know that can be of help to me?”

Create an Action Plan with a Schedule

Take your list of organizations and events and your contact list, and put together an action plan for making connections. Schedule networking events on your calendar, along with organizational meetings, conferences and so on. Using your contact list, set up a schedule for making a certain number of calls per day or per week.

Meet with People and Attend Events

Before you meet with someone or attend an event, review your list of strengths, and focus on your purpose for networking and marketing yourself. It helps to visualize or picture a successful outcome. Be friendly and professional, but most of all, be yourself. Spend time connecting with people on a personal level before asking for help or sharing your reason for networking. If you are meeting in person with someone on your contact list, always bring a gift—something they can remember you by.

Networking on the Net

The Internet is a valuable place to make connections and to learn fruitful information from colleagues. If you have a special interest or a special field, there is sure to be a newsgroup or threaded bulletin board on your topic. If not, start one by setting up a listserv at www.egroups.com, www.topica.com, or at similar sites.

Market Yourself

The actions you take depend on why you are marketing yourself, but think of yourself as a brand, “Brand You.” When marketers are marketing a product, they look for the “Unique Selling Proposition” (USP). A USP is something relevant and original that can be claimed for a particular product or service. The USP should be able to communicate: “Buy our brand and get this unique benefit.” When marketing yourself, you need to define who your “customers” are and what your Unique Selling Proposition is. Your list of strengths above should give you some clues, but the USP needs to be stated in a short phrase. People who are closest to you can often give you suggestions. It might be something like: “I help people to realize their dreams,” or “My leadership brings out the best in others,” or “I solve problems quickly and simply.”

Once you know your USP, brainstorm ways that you can market yourself and your uniqueness. The key is to let people know what you have to offer. Write an article for the company newsletter or a professional newsletter related to your USP. Volunteer to give a talk. Design a project that uses your unique talents and propose it to the right people. Be visible.

Assess Your Progress Toward Networking Goals

You may wish to keep a notebook of your action plans and your progress. It also helps to have someone as a sounding board. That person can be a friend, your boss, a mentor, or a professional coach. When we feel accountable for our actions to someone we trust, we are much more likely to follow through. It also helps to have someone who is willing to celebrate your successes and accomplishments with you.

Always Say “Thank You”

As you network, many people will offer you information, opportunities, and valuable contacts. In your notebook, keep track of the favors that people have done for you and make sure that you write each one a short and simple thank-you letter. People are always more willing to help someone who has been appreciative in the past.

Be Patient

Networking is a long-term activity. Steven Ginsburg of the Washington Post describes networking as “building social capital.” You may not see results overnight, and at first should expect to give more than you get. But over time, your network will become one of your most valued assets.

COMMON MISTAKES

You Don’t Want to Bother Anyone

Remember that people love to help others. Don’t take up too much of their time, and come well prepared. When you ask for someone’s time, be specific. Say, “I’d like 30 minutes of your time,” and

then stick to it. Don't outstay your welcome. Whenever you meet with someone, always be thinking, "Is there something I can do to help this person?" Create a win-win situation.

You Come On Too Strong

Networking is not about selling someone something they don't want. You are looking for opportunities to create a mutual relationship, where there is give and take. In order for networking to be successful, you have to be interested in developing a long-term relationship. Remind yourself that your focus is on relationship building, not on immediate results.

You Don't Come On Strongly Enough

You put yourself in networking situations, but never talk about your needs or interests. This may be because you are not clear enough about why you are networking, or you are networking for reasons that are not particularly important to you. Go back to step one and clarify your purpose.

MORE HELP

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