

Network Like a Pro

Done right, business networking can be one of the most cost effective ways to grow your business.

It is really about building relationships and expanding your circle of connections to new people who will get to know, like and trust you enough to recommend you, introduce you, and possibly buy from you at some point in the future. It can also lead to great strategic partnerships and friendships.

Here are a few tips that will help you network like a pro.

Prior to a networking event, consider these things:

- **What do you want from your network?** Are you looking for sales, specific connections, potential people to partner with?
- **What are your goals for the event?** Set specific and measurable connection goals that get to the heart of what you want to accomplish. Try something like: "I will leave this event with four subsequent informal meetings lined up."
- **What is your 15-30 second introduction?** You should have a short concise "commercial" that you can use to introduce yourself. Your commercial should include your name, the type of clients you serve, and the results your clients receive. Practice your commercial until you can comfortably and confidently deliver it.
- **What is your follow up plan?** Block time on your schedule to follow up with the people you will connect with at the event. Ideally, this will happen with 24 hours after the event. Be bold enough to block this time on your calendar **before** the event.
- **What do you bring to your network?** What connections do you have that would be useful to others? Do you have specific knowledge or experience that would be valuable?
- **What barriers do you face?** Do you expect to find instant success or customers? Do you have limiting beliefs you need to address such as: I am not good enough? I don't have anything to offer? Are you unclear on your identity or what you hope to gain? If someone asked you "How can I help you?" Are you able to answer the question?

At the event:

- Make sure you are ready with your commercial, business cards, calendar, name tag (worn on the right side), and answer to the question “How can I help you?”
- Make connections by engaging in short conversations and then moving on to someone else. Conversation starters like “So, what brings you here today?” or “How did you hear about this event?” usually work well.
- Spend 80 percent of your time listening to the other person and only 20% talking.
- Ask “How can I help you?”
- Exchange cards if you make a connection. When you receive their card, immediately write something on the back to help you remember them. Before you give them your card, write something you want them to remember about you.
- If you have made a promising connection, set a follow up meeting for coffee, lunch, etc. to continue the conversation or commit to reaching out to the other person within the next week to follow up.
- Politely disengage before walking away. “It’s been a pleasure meeting you.” works well.

After the event:

- Organize your business cards by date, event, etc. and enter them into your contact tracking database or spreadsheet.
- Always follow up on new business contacts with a phone call, email or letter, preferably within 24 hours. Personalize your communication. Use the opportunity to extend an invitation for a lunch or meeting to people you’d like to get to know better
- Connect via Linked In, Facebook or whatever social media site you are active on to continue the connection.
- Make referrals between business connections wherever possible. This establishes you as someone who wants to establish mutually beneficial relationships with other business professionals.

Networking is a great opportunity to grow your business. Follow these tips to start building your network.