Connection Pros

Title – Does Networking Really Work?

Sometime last month, I attended a meeting made up of people who are known as good networkers in the Valley. The people that put on this meeting called it a Networking Mastermind group. While I agree that I know a lot about networking, I never considered myself to be much of a mastermind. I'm guessing that many of you who know me would strongly agree.

The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the current state of networking, where networking is going, and how we can make the art of networking more effective. We talked about many of the local functions, as well as the new online networking phenomenon that was referred to as "social software." The online groups include LinkedIn, Ryze, Spoke, and many more.

As our 90-minute meeting progressed, there was one theme that kept coming up for me. As I listened to people talk and share their thoughts about the current state of networking, I came to the brutal realization that networking, in its current form, ISN'T WORKING!! The idea of millions of people attending thousands of events, handing out billions of business cards to anyone with a pulse, and listening to endless 30 second commercials just isn't doing what people want when it comes to networking.

If you think about it, the way we currently network hasn't changed in over 10 years. I've been deeply involved with Chambers of Commerce since 1993 and networking is being practiced the same way today as it was back then. Can you think of many things that are still being done the same way we did them in 1993? If there are, I'm willing to bet that they are no longer effective and are probably not being practiced by many people.

So, if our current form of networking isn't working, WHAT ARE WE SUPPOSED TO DO NOW!! This is a question that has been haunting my mind for the past three to four months and I've been working on a brand new way for people to meet and connect with others, which is EXACTLY what networking REALLY is.

Over the next few months, I'm going to share with you my vision for the New Face of Networking. I'm going to write about the concept of connectivity, what the traits are that really connect people, the process of creating connections, and how to look at networking as, not a way to sell your product or service, but as a way of getting to know people in a deep way that will cause a much stronger bond.

Before I can share with you the New Face of Networking, I need to review with you what I currently see as networking. My definition of networking as ALWAYS been: Being a valuable business and personal resource for others and EXPECTING NOTHING IN RETURN. This definition was accurate ten years ago, it's accurate today and will be accurate for a long time to come.

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What has happened over the past three to five years is that people have become more desperate due to layoffs, cutbacks, bad economic times and more. Due to this desperation, people have pulled away from helping others and are spending more time doing what is necessary for themselves. The challenge we face is that we are somewhat responsible for this state of desperation. Instead of spending time trying to get to know people and making the connections necessary to REALLY grow a business, we have ignored that part and jumped right into sales pitches and most people are turned off by this. Most people attending a networking function are so busy hiding behind their own business card that it's very difficult for them to step out and start connecting with others.

This is why the very first part of the new face of networking is identifying how people become connected. It's not based on your name or your title or the company you work for. It's not based on the products your company offers or the service your company provides. It's based on one very simple concept and that concept is COMMONALITY!!

The way people become truly connected to others is by finding things that they have in common with other people. It's very difficult to find things in common if the only thing they talk about is their work or business. We need to spend more time exploring all the other things that connect us because, once we have created that common bond, we start to like the other people and likeability, trustworthiness, and dependability are three traits that are always present in a great business or personal relationship.

Speaking of relationships, the idea that people network so they can "create relationships" with others is a total fallacy. You don't create relationships at a networking function or anywhere else, for that matter. Relationships are grown, nurtured, built. They are not created. The sooner people understand that strong business and personal relationships take time, the sooner they'll do what is necessary to find the common bond between themselves and others. See you next month!