

Ask Yourself When Networking: “What Can I Do For You?”

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At a networking event I recently attended, I overheard a group of people say that their goal for the evening was to get as many business cards as possible. This comment was followed by laughter, like they were on some kind of top-secret mission. I didn't think much about this situation until I received a call from a woman who was trying to sell me a service. When I asked how she had received my business information, she said hesitantly, “At the XYZ event.” I knew I had never spoken with this woman and couldn't get off the phone fast enough.

I started thinking about Networking and how it can lose its effectiveness if not handled appropriately. Following are a few of the tips I give my clients, whether they are looking for a new job or are trying to bring in more business.

Tip #1 – Change How You Look at Networking and Seize Opportunities

Most of us think that networking only applies to business situations, but the definition is much broader than that. Networking involves establishing contact with others and sharing information that benefits one or both parties. At a company I worked for, we hired a woman because she met our V.P. of Engineering at Home Depot. They started talking and she mentioned she was looking for a job. This happened because she made her situation known to a complete stranger in a very unlikely place. Start looking at networking as an opportunity to talk to other people, wherever you are.

Tip #2 - Think About Who You Want to Meet and Develop a Plan

Are you looking for a job in a particular industry? Do you want to interact with people who may use your business services? Write down a detailed description of the type of people you want to meet. What interests do they have? Where might they spend their time? Once you have a plan, go out and meet them. Planning will save you time and money and will increase your likelihood of success.

Tip #3 - Find Networking Events that You Enjoy Attending

Find a networking group that meets your needs. I joined **San Mateo Professional Alliance**, founded by Mike Foor, a real estate broker on the Peninsula. Fees are low, and members can meet for lunch weekly from 12-1 p.m. People seem genuinely interested in promoting each other's businesses. Contact: (650) 430-6500, or www.mikefoor.com

Tip #4 - Focus on Developing Relationships and on Helping Others First

What is the best way to engage a person you meet at a networking event? Instead of focusing on your needs, spend a few minutes thinking about the needs of the person facing you. How might you help *them*?