

NETWORKING TIPS: 5 EASY WAYS TO BUILD A STRONG PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

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Networking is paramount when you're building a small business.

It is often your most effective form of marketing. And, it is free.

While networking may not take anything out of your business's bank account, you do need to put a little time and effort into it. And contrary to popular belief, networking is not trying to close a deal or get something from someone. It is not begging for help from someone. It is not even about convincing someone to help you out.

In business, networking is meeting and interacting with individuals who have similar interests in an effort to build relationships that will produce current and future benefits.

Networking is about relationships. It is about being friendly. It is about finding others who will enhance your life and career.

So, how do you do it? What are the best ways to use networking to build your business? Networking is actually quite easy. Follow these 5 simple tips to successfully build a strong professional network.

1. Learn Their Needs First

Networking isn't about being pushy and begging for handouts.

It is a "you scratch my back; I'll scratch yours" mentality. When you begin a networking relationship, learn how you can help them first. Networking relationships don't form when you meet someone new and start asking for favors. Find out what you can do for them, and hope you get the same in return.

2. Network In and Out of Your Industry

Making connections and relationships within your industry is a great place to start. Find people you can help who just might help you in return. But, don't stop there.

Branch out from your usual circle. Just because someone is not in your industry does not mean they are not a valuable part of your network. Word of mouth and referrals are a big part of networking, and you never know who is going to be talking about you.

3. Focus on Helping

When you begin networking take all the focus on you. Do not start with the mentality of getting help. Focus your energy on being friendly and helpful to others. If you focus on this, you are much more likely to create relationships that will, in turn, benefit you.

Start out being a giver, not a taker. The best way to help yourself is to help someone else.

4. Follow Up

After you meet or contact someone new, follow up with them.

Don't wait for them to call or email you. Don't hope you will run into them again. Be proactive in creating a deeper relationship with them. A few days after meeting them, send a quick email offering to help. Remember to first focus on how you can help them. Be friendly. Following up in a way that is not focused on getting something out of them will ensure the relationship is built on mutual trust.

5. *Quality Not Quantity*

You don't want to throw business cards out to everyone you meet. Focus on quality contacts and networks over quantity. Having a strong network is far more effective than a huge network of people you have only talked to once. Business networking relationships are, in fact, relationships. Take time to nurture them and build quality bonds.