

TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

July 2007

Networking is imperative when taking yourself to the next level



Do you approach networking as a welcome opportunity to make new professional connections? Or are you avoiding it until a colleague

drags you to a local business event when you'd rather be home watching reruns of Seinfeld? Are those business cards you collected at the last Greater Tallahassee Chamber of Commerce meeting still hidden away in the corner of your desk drawer? Love it or hate it, networking is a necessary strategy to develop valuable relationships that ensures success for you and your business.

For many individuals that love to network it is an opportunity to get to know people; they understand that opportunities and new business are the result. In fact, networking will typically generate 80 percent more results than a cold call. For others, just the thought of the word "networking" is quickly followed by a small knot of dread that wells up somewhere between the chest and stomach.

For those that see networking as a challenge, one of America's great inspirational writers, William Arthur Ward, said it best. "The experienced mountain climber is not intimidated by a mountain—he is inspired by it. The persistent winner is not discouraged by a problem—he is

challenged by it. Mountains are created to be conquered." Viewing networking as your mountain—waiting to be conquered—enables you to embark on a journey that is sure to have a return on your investment of time.

In an over-crowded and competitive marketplace, networking is the one tool that keeps you informed, increases your referral bases, increases your visibility and helps you stay on the cutting-edge. There are now more and more business groups, professional associations, and community organizations that provide networking opportunities—to the point that some may feel all of the meetings, conferences, seminars and events are dizzying. With a plethora of networking opportunities it can be incredibly difficult to pinpoint where and how to invest your valuable time.

You are busy and time-constrained. You don't need more contacts in your address book who you don't call, but rather people with a common interest who can really help move your business forward. Networking should deliver results for you and your business. Focusing your energy and time on developing high-value relationships with people who can help you take your business to new heights is the name of the game in today's business world. Here's how you get your networking working, and winning, for you.

Identify Your Networking Objective

As business leaders, our lives revolve around what it takes to implement new ideas, raise capital, acquire and satisfy customers, generate revenue and control costs. Approach networking just like you would any activity for your business. Identify the objective you want to accomplish through networking so that it aligns with what you're driving in your business. It's networking with a purpose that delivers tangible results.

Messaging is Key

Develop your "30 second elevator speech." Preparation is all about packaging who you are, what you have to offer and what your goals are. Legend has it that the elevator speech originated on Wall Street in the '70s as investors had only 30 seconds between the lobby and the top floor to make the deal. Your elevator speech is a concise, carefully planned and well-practiced description about your company that is easy to understand.

See and Be Seen

Yes, it makes perfect sense to join professional associations and business groups and attend their events, seminars and conferences so people know you're out there. That's when you tell the story about your business to anyone who will listen

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

because you never know who might have something valuable that could give you and your business an edge in the marketplace.

However, use this time wisely. Get creative and target people you know you want to meet. Often you can get a copy of the attendee list for an event which generally lists names, titles, company names and contact information. This gives you a lot of intelligence to help you align your networking objective to the right people. Leave the event having met a handful of people who can make a difference in your business, not with a business card collection to add to your stack back at your desk.

Look for Connections

Networking is about creating relationships that have the potential to generate profit for your business. In order to get there, you must build trust with your contacts. It is said that every person you meet has 200 to 250 people with whom they connect that could potentially assist you. I prefer to think that you have 200 to 250 people that could potentially help others. Helping others is the key to helping yourself; if your contacts view you as a resource, you increase their ability and willingness to reach out to you. The more you invite opportunity to knock, the better your chances of turning your network connections into profit.

Utilize the resources that are out there to connect to others. Online networking sites such as LinkedIn allow you to build a professional profile that connects to other people you know, and can be easily found

by users searching for a business or person by expertise and location. While online networking will not substitute for relationships you have established one-on-one, it is another means of making yourself accessible for contact and opportunities.

Give Back

As with any relationship, there's give and take. If you are taking too much from your network, it won't be long before you drop to the bottom of your contacts' call-back lists. Think strategically about your network and who would naturally benefit from knowing one another, and don't hesitate to make those introductions. If you can create a high-value connection on someone else's behalf, it strengthens the network and ensures the success of all its members. It seems simple but you will be rewarded in small and large ways for doing good unto others and thinking about more than your own needs or interests.

The ultimate goal of networking is becoming a connector. In his book, *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell describes a person who knows many other people as a "connector" and he credits connectors with facilitating much of the interaction people have with each other. Whether it is a job, a restaurant recommendation or a good book to read, connectors help others get what they need by connecting people who don't know each other. This is also how you build a professional network.

The return on investment for networking is undeniable. According to the Directory of Networking

Organizations, many businesses develop 50 to 90 percent of their client base through networking and the referrals it generates. Give it some time and effort, and you'll find yourself reaching the summit and enjoying the view from the top.

What's your mountain? Karen Moore is CEO and founder of Moore Consulting Group, an integrated communications firm in Tallahassee, FL. She has more than 20 years of experience managing highly visible programs in marketing communications, public relations and advertising. 



Karen Moore, APR, CPRC
CEO and Founder at Moore Consulting Group

Karen's 10 B's for Networking

1. Be prepared
2. Be approachable
3. Be confident
4. Be appreciative
5. Be empathetic
6. Be enthusiastic
7. Be assertive
8. Be realistic
9. Be determined
10. Be ready for your success

And, always follow up.