



PETRA PEOPLE

BEST NETWORKING STRATEGIES



BEST NETWORKING STRATEGIES **LIFE LESSONS for BUSINESS OWNERS**

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With social networking literally at our fingertips, many of us don't get as much practice with traditional networking. Engaging with colleagues, business prospects and friends face-to-face requires alternate skill sets than those expected through online interactions.

For instance, you must think on your feet in a real-time networking scenario while social networking allows delays in between interactions. Someone may post on your wall, and you can respond hours later with a crafted response. Try any amount of non-response or quiet time in a face-to-face networking session. Awkward.

Further, traditional networking requires you to translate social cues and control your own simultaneously. In social networking, all you have is words. The complexities of tone and body language can't be fulfilled in emoticons.

When you're face-to-face your actual words mean little in your overall impressions. Many studies show words account for less than 10 percent of what you're actually conveying during face-to-face interaction.

With digital interactions occurring more regularly than in-person exchanges, many of us need to brush up on our traditional networking skills.

Here are five networking tips I live by and regularly pass on to the business teams I work with:

1. **Brush up on industry news** – Leading up to the event, I refresh myself on the industry best sellers and spend a bit more time than usual ingesting news. I recommend this because you want to make sure you can contribute to conversation on multiple levels. The best way to do this is by familiarizing yourself with relevant news.

2. **Set a goal** – The overall point of a business networking is to establish and develop business connections. There's no reason to be shy about that. Anyone attending the networking event realizes the fundamental purpose. Networking isn't an opportunity to isolate yourself in a corner with colleagues you're already familiar with to catch up on industry gossip.

When I owned my wireless company, my sales team and I would meet before a networking event and write out our individual objectives in attending the conference, mixer or happy hour. Maybe your goal would be to set up three subsequent face-to-face visits with contacts you meet at the event. Perhaps your goal is pass out your business card to 10 qualified leads while you're there. Establishing these goals keep you focused on the primary reason you're there—to do business.

1. **Arrange introductions** – The truth is, I'm kind of an introvert. If I'm hoping to get some face time with someone in particular whom I've never met before, approaching him or her directly isn't my preferred method of setting the introduction. What I like to do is find a mutual connection who can initiate the meeting. This approach eases any anxiety an introvert like myself may feel in a big networking setting. If you look, and ask around, you can find a friend in the room to make that connection.

2. **Shut up and listen** – When you're engaging in conversation, let the other person do most of the talking and listen to what he or she saying. Lending someone your ear is a fast way to make a friend. Why? Because a good listener is a rare find and therefore valued. That's advice straight from Dale Carnegie's "How to Win Friends and Influence People." Plus, by really listening, you'll be able to respond intelligently and you might even learn something. I go by an 80/20 rule – the other person has the spotlight and talks 80 percent of the time.

3. **Lend a helping hand** – Instead of focusing on how connections can help you, discover ways you can help your new acquaintances. In a world where many are focused on self-glorification, finding ways to bolster others is refreshing and appreciated. Do this: Ask, "What can I do for you?" You can bet they don't get asked that often.

This doesn't have to be extravagant. If someone is talking passionately about an industry hot topic, tell him or her about a blog post you recently read on the subject and offer to email the link. Once you follow through in the coming days, you'll show you're reliable and thoughtful. Plus, by extending the conversation past the networking event, you've deepened your connection.

Traditional networking helps pave the path to deep relationships, which are essential to professional and personal well-being. That being said, the real value of networking happens after the event is over when the conversation can evolve past the 15-minute small talk during a one-on-one coffee or ongoing email correspondence. I challenge you to think in these terms at your next event: How do I make this new connection last 25 years? Then, follow through with your actions accordingly.

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