

Real Net[work]ing

A preparation guide for Industry, Organisational and Function Networking

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With a growing trend towards the reliance on technology, we are fast forgetting the importance of traditional business methods. Despite the best gadgets and the cleverest of marketing campaigns, nothing will ever replace networking as a true qualifier for creating and managing business relationships. It is therefore time to re-visit our approach to building business relationships, and invest time and effort into re-energising and harnessing face to face connections.

At BConsulted we believe the more that you reveal the quintessence of yourself, the more opportunity you will have to foster and establish a trust based business relationship that yields great outcomes. Additionally, the more clearly you understand your goals, the better you can create and commit to reciprocal networks that will support you both personally and professionally.

However, for many networking can be a daunting activity to undertake, as we bring a raft of expectations, pre-conceived ideas and experiences to each event we attend. Networking is a necessary component of every single job title. It is therefore imperative that we master our networking strategy to ensure our success. Whether you want to grow your business, build your profile, benchmark or exchange information, let's all agree that learning to mingle and to follow-up with business networking contacts is crucial to your career's success.

The Facts:

- Statistics from the Federal Bureau of Labor, indicate that 70 percent of all jobs are found through networking (personal contacts). Furthermore, it is estimated that the average person will change jobs 10.3 times during their life and have three to five different career changes.
- According to the Corporate Leadership Council's '10 Talent Management Insights for the Chief Human Resource Officer', The success of high potential employees depends on the quality of their networks in the organisation. The most effective strategy for realising employee potential relates to employees' interpersonal connections.
- Research at institutions such as Harvard and M.I.T. has consistently shown that employees' personal networks are in many cases the single biggest factor impacting their productivity and ability to contribute to the company.

These figures indicate that the more successfully you understand and utilise your people skills, personality and ultimately your ability to network, the more opportunities you will have for career progression and goal achievement.

The Advice:

My career was founded on networking and I have attended an average of 2 to 3 events every week for the last decade. Having networked with nearly every job title in every industry sector around the world, I have utilised these networking opportunities to create and manage both internal and external networks all of which have lead to my own career progression and a multitude of positive outcomes. The culmination of this experience and the accompanying research and observations have defined to me what real networking is and should always be and this forms the basis of my advice.

There are several reasons to create networks, these are mainly categorised by the opportunity to do business with one another, refer business to one another or help one another in any way. What ever your purpose; the following 5 guidelines will assist you to leverage your outcomes.

5 Networking Guidelines:

1. **Prepare.** Industry and organisational events are an open door to boost your networks and therefore need to be attended with strategy and purpose. Unfortunately, the majority of people simply sign up and show up! In fact, research with our clients has indicated that 79% admit to doing 15 minutes or no preparation prior to attending events. It is critical to allow time before the event to prepare your goals and establish what you want to get out of the event or you want to put into the event. Is it that you want to meet new business clients, meet the guest speaker, or find out more about events in your industry? I also find it very helpful to contact the organiser to find out the small however very useful details such as dress code, seminar times, speaker amendments, key attendees and any other relevant information to assist me.
2. **Explore.** Attending conferences and events allows you to think of different ways to present yourself and your business therefore enabling you to adapt to the market you are networking with at the time. Ensure you arrive early, especially if you are shy, this will enable you to get acquainted with the room and means that people arriving will come up to you, this way its not as daunting as walking into a full room of strangers. You will also maximise your outcomes as its best to meet all your targets prior to the start of the formal proceedings in case they leave early and you miss them.
3. **Be Real.** People are more likely to engage with you if they like you and vice versa. At all times stay true to your personality and be authentic. You will build trust by giving eye contact; remember to look at all people in the circle not just one or two, which is quite a common behaviour I see. Being real and true to yourself in your interactions with others, contributes strongly to the formation of long term, solid relationships.
4. **NetWORK.** Don't spend the entire event with people you already know. It's not called net-sit, net-eat or net-drink, so ensure you meet new people and initiate a structured, memorable conversation with each. What ever you do, don't start with the question "what do you do?", it alienates people and makes them feel judged. The start of the business relationship is about establishing rapport and trust, you will have time to qualify once you know if you like each other first.
5. **Futurise.** Don't monopolise people. If the conversation is going really well, and you feel that there is a fit for your network, ask them if they'd be willing to meet for coffee, breakfast, lunch to explore the connection further. If you can't see a fit for your network, excuse yourself politely to allow others to meet them and you to meet others. I believe there is one degree of separation these days, so never burn bridges and don't agree to anything unless you have ever intention of fulfilling it.

Remember:

Be real to create and manage long term profitable business relationships

Make connections and contribute to reciprocal referrals

Network. Network. Network. Build networks that are aligned to your goals and support your career.

Julia Palmer is a leading global expert on profitable business relationships. Julia personally delivers **mentoring, facilitation and speaking** services in the field of relationships, networks and communication.

BConsulted is Australia's leading business relationship consultancy offering **training, diagnostics and resources** that improve corporate productivity by refining business relationship strategies.

If you would like any further information; or to access resources to assist your professional development please visit www.bconsulted.com.au or call 1300 785 815