Smart Networking for Business & Personal Success

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Why Smart Networking?

Over the years I've enjoyed an astonishing array of business and personal opportunities—some that I would never have envisioned. Most memorable is the period that my business grew from zero to 75 clients in just one year! Today, I can trace the success back to one source—Smart Networking—the system and philosophy that I've devised, practiced and refined throughout my career.

I believe you can't just make "cold calls" and expect to get business. I've learned that networking is one of the best ways to grow revenue, because people like to do business with those they know and trust. Instead of the typical "cold calling", I place more emphasis on networking—the activity where we meet people eye-to-eye and freely exchange ideas. So early on in my career, I set out to have coffee and lunch meetings with people, and over time developed a networking process that served me well.

For over 30 years, I have worked in major corporations, such as John Deere, American Airlines and Reuters, and I have held C-suite and executive positions in operations, finance, facilities, client services, HR and Total Quality Management. I was appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce to the Board of Examiners for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, and received the Founders Award (one of only 20 recipients in the US) for my work in the field of Employee Involvement.

In spite of my corporate successes, there was always something missing—a career that fulfilled my entrepreneurial passion. I had always wanted to start my own business, but I wanted to find the right partners and the right services to offer. Then, I noticed that Information Technology (IT) is an expanding area. I also realized that it is going to be around for a long time, because technology is always changing. During one consulting assignment, I ran into several IT professionals (my eventual business partners), and together, we decided that we could offer IT services better than currently provided. We formed Alliance Technologies, LLC in 2009 and have been growing ever since. Fortunately, this adventure has been a positive and rewarding one!

Throughout my career, I have always approached networking from a "giving" standpoint. That is, what can I do to help others? By thinking that, meetings became more comfortable for me. I was at a loss to make a "sales pitch", as I never really held a sales position. Instead, my experience in Operations most likely helped me to focus on how to help the other person be successful.

I whole-heartedly encourage each of you to be a smart networker, and to try to assist other people with their connections, especially if you are a job seeker. One of my first networking successes was co-founding ExecNet with seven other professionals. It's an exclusive group for executives in career transition. We organized executives, director level and above, to write a one-page letter about themselves and the organizations they were trying to get into, i.e. who I am, my objectives, and the type of organizations. I translated that document into the business-to-business world and created the company information sheet. It's a very useful document to share at networking meetings.

While I'm out networking for business opportunities, I also get connected with people that are looking for jobs. I certainly can help them with the process, as I know enough people through my connections. So Smart Networking applies to the business world and those looking for a job—including those college students that are graduating. When they use this process for networking, they find a job much faster than going out on the web and searching, making phone calls or the typical collegiate interview.

When you're networking appropriately—and asking how you can help others—referrals tend to come naturally and abundantly. Smart Networking is all about building connections and helping each other succeed.

Smart Networking Philosophy

My networking philosophy is that you can never give too much. Giving more to another person, and sharing more with them, is a great way to help them. In fact, they will feel a little more indebted and be willing to help you because you have opened doors for them. Conversely, I find that all you have to do is ask, and people are willing to help. Most people are eager to "pay it forward". Those who are givers are always top on my list for receiving connections—they stay on my radar screen.

I grew up in a family where my father and mother were very active in the community. So, I always wanted to find ways to be active locally and to help other people. Consequently, I will give and give and give, if I am aware of opportunities. I don't worry about whether or not it will come back to me. I know it will come back—usually in multiples!—if you are doing the right thing and if it is in your heart to give.

You will find that the person you are calling may have been in a similar position. They know how you are feeling, they know what you are going through, and so, they are

very willing to help. You can't close off and say "Oh woe is me, I don't know what to do". You want to step forward, be positive, reach out, ask people for assistance and they will surprise you—they will help!

As you network, keep in mind that people are attracted to people with vision, excitement, and being positive and wanting to do the right thing. You are going to help someone like that far more than you are going to help someone who is having a "pity party". Occasionally, bad things happen to all of us. It is not always roses, but look for the opportunities, remain positive, and ask people for assistance. They will help and you will be on your way soon. There were times in the beginning that I didn't get anything back. You can get a little discouraged in the beginning when you are first starting your network. But I would say to you, press on—because you <u>will</u> get to that point when the phone starts ringing, and it is an exciting time when that happens!

I think that the more we get out and share, the more the customer understands that what we are really trying to do is to provide the very best service by creating a giving environment and paying it forward. If you continue down that path you will eventually get more people sharing with you their ideas and opportunities. It's a ripple effect. Just the other day, I was having coffee with a friend of mine and my phone rang. It was a colleague with another opportunity that he wanted to tell me about. So, this happens to me three or four times a week now. I get these opportunities steadily coming in because in the beginning, I gave so much and shared with people my network and my process.

Another aspect of the giving philosophy is being community-minded. Joining and getting involved in community groups is an ideal way to expand your networking activities. With no regrets, I have participated as a member or leader in as many as 23 civic and professional organizations at either a local, state or national level.

Things happen for a reason, and I have faith that there is someone who is steering me in the right direction. Of course there is a reason why I am connecting with an individual. I don't have to walk away with an opportunity from them. I'd rather give them what they need without looking for anything in return. It is not a "tit for tat". I don't expect something in return. I am going to sit down with that person during a coffee or a luncheon meeting. I will get them talking and I spend the majority of an hour just listening and learning about them. Then, I connect them with some people that I know who can help them. It may not lead to business right away, but if they are open-minded about the connection, it will lead to opportunities down the road.

I've always been one that enjoyed giving more than receiving—and with giving, I feel fulfilled. When I help other people, it fills an empty spot in my heart—and if everyone had a similar attitude, wouldn't the world be a different place?

Smart Networking System

Smart Networking generates valued connections and trusted relationships, and yet, it can also be intimidating and overwhelming. So, I have created for you these

guidelines, tips and suggestions to simplify and expedite your Smart Networking process for business and personal success.

When I shared my system with a group of business owners, they encouraged me to write this book and share it with the world. Indeed, they saw that Smart Networking is applicable not only to business, but to job seekers as well. One colleague suggested that the system could help young people get the college/university acceptance and/or the internships/jobs they desire. I have shared this system with my children and they, too, are enjoying incredible success in creating opportunities for themselves. Young adults learn so quickly and are fearless in applying what they learn.

The Smart Networking system is comprised of three elements: 1—The Prep, 2—The Meeting and 3—The Follow-up.

1—THE PREP

The key to getting the most from your networking meeting is planning. I designed the following planning tips to help you produce the maximum benefit with the minimum time investment.

Keep an open mind

When it comes to connecting, you never know where you will get an opportunity or where it will lead. Be open to meeting with everyone, not just the people whom you think will be your client. You never know when or where you'll meet a great connection, so it's important to always be open and ready to network. Never consider it a mishap or feel like you had a bad meeting. There can be good in everyone you meet and every person is worthwhile. Focus on the positive.

Organize your connection list

The best place to start is to create your own list of connections and keep it organized. Copy your connection's contact information into a Word document and write a few descriptive sentences about each one. Save the information in alphabetical order by contact for quick access. You will be surprised how quickly your connection document will grow. Currently mine is over 100 pages.

Initiate—don't procrastinate

You will always be the one initiating the contact, so don't procrastinate—do it now! Even after you develop a strong network you will still want to take the initiative and be the one to reach out to the contact.

Scout for connections

Where do you look for potential connections? The best place is your inner circle. Friends, associates, business meetings, service providers, neighbors, family, etc.—always be on the lookout for a good connection. As I recall, I started out by contacting friends, colleagues and business groups. So, I recommend to anyone that wants to develop business, start by reaching out to the people you know best. Don't be shy about sharing your philosophies and the way you are developing success. Then, walk away from every meeting with more connections to be made.

Scheduling

Be timely and organized. To schedule a meeting, send out an email or make a phone call. Ask to set up a coffee or lunch in the coming weeks. Usually, you will be scheduling the meeting for a week or two ahead. Most will always agree to connect with you.

Use an email management program such as Microsoft Outlook to schedule your meetings and always put their contact information and your contact information in the invite. Make sure you send a meeting notice to them indicating location, time, and phone

number. Always get their cell phone number, if you can, in case of emergency. Attempt to schedule a minimum of two meetings a day. Having three a day or more will really jump start your networking efforts.

Location

Be specific about meeting location. Many restaurant chains have more than one location, so including the nearest cross street or neighborhood is helpful. When you are selecting a location, choose one that is conducive to a business discussion.

Research

Get to know the person beforehand. This is the most important prep you can do. Use LinkedIn to look up information about the person you are meeting, including their picture, their connections, education, and interests. Also check out their website, if they have one. This will be helpful in recognizing the person at the location as well as initiating the discussion with them. Do a little research to find out what their interests are and how you are connected. During the meeting, you will be able to use your research to get the conversation going.

Information handout

In addition my business card, I always have an information sheet that I give to my new connection when we meet. It's a one-page summary of my contact information, company intro, main business objective, company promise and a list of client targets. The list, especially, is a great catalyst for prompting the person to say, 'Oh yeah … law firm … I know someone! I'd be happy to introduce you to him." It gets that person thinking about people they can refer to you. For efficiency sake, I highly recommend you create your own one-page information sheet to present with your business card at each networking meeting.

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