

Networking Doesn't Work

By Mac Cassity

Networking doesn't work. This one statement angers me more than just about anything else I hear related to business and the professional world. Why? Because it's crap. 100% pure crap.

This statement is uttered by folks usually from one of two camps: The old schoolers, and the personality impaired. Let's go ahead and start with the old schoolers.

The reason I start here is because this camp has generally gotten where they want to be, to some degree, in spite of themselves. You see, 25-35+ years ago, business was different...WAY different. My father, for instance, made his fortunes knocking on doors, in not so good neighborhoods, selling life insurance. Yep, that's right, and if you knew my dad, that would be one impressive statement indeed. You see, pop is not such a big guy and considering his relatively sedentary lifestyle as of now, does NOT look like a guy who would be knocking on doors all day. But, he did, and he did so to the tune of millions of dollars. Back when he started in 1971, he had to produce, produce fast, or he was done, simple as that. He did what he needed to do, and never looked back. The trouble is, those times are gone. The old schoolers don't REALLY know that though. They have done their job and they usually have a good number of customers in their base. This allows them to cross market products to this base and use these existing customers as referral sources to grow. They don't realize that the trick to gaining NEW customers and the way new businesses have to operate has changed greatly. The old schoolers do realize that customers don't come to them quite as easily as before, they are just stubborn when it comes to trying new things to turn on those "production faucets" again. Now, why do these old schoolers say networking doesn't work? Simple, networking is a process, not a one shot quick fix. They are used to doing something, and getting a sale. I.E. knocking on a door, making a sale, setting up an appt making a sale, etc. Now, certainly there are some pretty good sales techniques required to get to those sales with limited contact, and while even those have drastically changed, these old schoolers still possess some pretty handy skills. The fact is this, these folks have attended networking events, handed out business cards, and because their phone wasn't ringing off the hook, or the fact that everyone they followed up with didn't want to buy, they say "Networking Doesn't Work." Crap.

Ok, on to the personality impaired. The fact is, they are right. Networking Doesn't Work. Not for them anyways. You see, if someone doesn't like you, they won't do business with you. They won't refer you either. I know, I know, YOU aren't in this group...are you? A lot of the people who ARE in this group don't know it, and therein lays the problem. No one wants to be the one talked about negatively after a networking event, but it happens. No one wants to be the least referred business person in a referral or lead group, but it happens, and it is usually because these folks are personality impaired. They talk too much about themselves. They are rude or egotistical. They get drunk and act inappropriately or they are just plain weird. Just reading this in black and white paints a picture or two of someone you have come across before, doesn't it? Now, you may have more knowledge and more experience than EVERYONE else in your field, but if you can't overcome at least SOME personality deficiencies, it may be hard to get this point across to other people. Networking is about relationship building. You aren't there to get a

sale. (And if you think you are, you are probably one of the folks that others are talking about...negatively) You are there to meet someone, build a relationship, and follow up at a later time to begin cultivating that relationship, and hopefully, lead to them giving you referrals. Notice I didn't say lead to a sale...I would rather have someone give me referrals on an ongoing basis than just make one sale...how about you?

So, how DOES Networking work? I started talking about it above. It is a process. It is about relationships. It is about following up. It happens over time, not immediately. But the good news is, if you do it right, it does work. In fact, if done correctly, and over time, networking, and building referral relationships is by and large THE most effective thing you can do for your business, bar none. Advertising, websites, marketing promotions, etc. They all cost money on an ongoing basis to be effective, and they are all pretty much time sensitive. (They are vital at least during certain phases of your business, don't get me wrong) but let's look at the goal of networking. Referrals. What if you got to a point in your business where you had made quite a number of contacts...treated them all the right way...and are now getting referrals on a regular basis..day after day, year after year. Think about it. You pick up the phone, referral. You look in your email inbox, referral. At that point, how much are you paying for new business? Starting to get my drift now, aren't you? Networking, if done correctly, can and will be the single most effective thing you do for your business. Whether you are an employee, or a business owner, networking is truly one of the greatest keys to success. Take the time to learn what it is you should do at networking events. What it is you should do when following up with folks you meet. What you should do to take care and nurture those relationships over time to encourage ongoing referrals. And finally, putting all that into a system that still allows you to give each customer the proper service and care they deserve to make sure THEY will stay your customer for years to come.

Do me a favor, all you business professionals out there. Before you say something DOESN'T work, check it out. Read about how to do it for real. Learn from others who have been successful at it, and for god's sakes, look at your selves! Listen to what others are saying about you and take some time for some personal growth. You might just make a splash at the next networking event, and this time, not in a bad way...