

THREE TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE NETWORKING

By Marilyn J. Holt, CMC

Personal sales calls are the most effective form of selling. No one has time to make or take them.

Networking has replaced the personal cold call in many industries. If you do it right, it is more effective, more personally satisfying, and opens doors for the personal warm or hot call. Most networking happens at affinity events, which are events aimed at some niche of the business community, such as small business owners, electrical engineers, marketing managers, and so on.

Networking is not easy. You have to be able to put your game face on at 7 a.m. or 9 p.m. You need to know what you do, how you help your customer, and why your product or service is compelling to others and tell them about it. You have to be willing to listen and remember. You have to be able to be prepared for the best, and have your calendar ready to add appointments.

NETWORK EFFECTIVELY USING YOUR TEAM

Network every week. If you can do seven events a week, go for it, but use your team. Networking is part of everyone's job; they should know that team's jobs depend on it. Develop a message (or set of messages) that you and your team can talk about, and make sure that each person carries at least 50 business cards with his/her name, title, and direct contact information. Split up the attendees or the room up amongst your team so you do not overlap.

Since you are taking your team, buy a table (8 or 10 seats), so your company's name is on the table. Then invite others to sit at your table with you and one or two key people from your firm. Everyone else

should sit at unsponsored tables and continue networking over

TALK LESS – IT'S ALL ABOUT THE OTHER GUY

Networking is not a monologue. It is all about getting to know new people and cementing relationships with people you know, but with whom you do not do business, yet. Keep the statement about your work short and clear. This is your two floor elevator speech. Listen carefully; and then learn about the other person and his/her company. Ask questions, and some times tell them how your company and products can make his/her life better. Find a way that you can work together in the future. Write notes if you have to, because the next time you meet this person there will be a test.

FOLLOW-UP AND FOLLOW-THROUGH

A networking event is a cold call that needs follow-up. As with cold calling, know whom you are contacting. If a pre-attendance sheet is available, get it. If you do not know who will be attending, you should have an idea the type of person who will be there.

Trade cards with the people you talk with. Make notes for follow-up after the event, write the name and date of the event on each card, then add and update the information in your contact manager database. Send a personal e-mail or post card to each person a day or two after event. Then contact them within three days and say that you enjoyed meeting them, and invite them to visit your business. If you promised to send them something, like a product sample, follow through and get it out within 48 yours. Be an attractive business partner.

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