

## **Effective Networking—Making the Contacts! (a.k.a. My “Pet Peaves” Regarding Networkers)**

Why has networking developed a negative reputation? My belief is that negativity is associated with networking because it is typically done improperly and for the wrong reasons! If you see meeting others solely as a means to personal gain, you will be seen as an opportunist, not as a professional with effective networking skills. Picture the salesperson you dodge at meetings, because you prefer to avoid being pinned in the corner of the room. Is this how you want to be perceived by your potential clients? I could have called this article, “Julie’s Pet Peaves Regarding Networking”; however, if they are mine, they are probably also perceived negatively by others as well. So, here we go...

The premise behind effective networking is that people do business with and refer business to those whom they trust and like. Credibility and likability are keys to the process. Very often I notice others who attend business and professional events only when they are either looking for a job or have recently started a new position where they need contacts for sales purposes. I speak regularly to professionals who are concerned about a layoff or those who have recently been laid off. One of the first things that I ask them is about their involvement in professional organizations. Often they tell me that they know that they should get involved, but that they haven’t had time. The lesson to be learned: don’t wait until you have time, ie, become unemployed, before you get involved!

Additionally, I see business people who commit to a board or committee and then do not follow through. Relationships and credibility are built over time, by doing what you say that you will, when you say that you will do it or by “walking the talk.” If someone joins a group solely for what they can gain from others, their motives become transparent very quickly. After all, what is my perception of how you will service my business account if you don’t even follow through with your volunteer commitments. On the contrary, if you present yourself as a trusted professional and a team player on a volunteer basis, my inclination is that you will be an excellent partner for my business. Depth of involvement is much more important to building credibility than becoming involved with a number of groups “on the surface” only.

Another mistake that some well-intentioned business people make is to fail to realize that business is a two way street. If someone refers business my way, I will normally go out of my way to discover opportunities to refer to that person or company. I will only refer business to trusted firms, but my preference will always be to work with firms who work with ours or refer to ours. The key philosophy is that I view my success in terms of the success of my client firms. In other words, I want to be a catalyst for, and therefore reap the benefits of, my clients’ success.

Lastly, have you ever felt “networked”? When you meet new business professionals, talk with them about their business and their industry. People who are perceived to be good listeners are those who ask questions about the other person rather than just talking about

themselves or their business. Building rapport and showing general interest in others will take you further than a pushy sales speech ever will! Once personal relationships are established, business relationships will often be the natural outcome.

In the end, my message is that we must all recognize that networking is not simply a means to an end but a process of developing mutually beneficial relationships. Meeting new people and developing relationships comes more naturally to some than others; however, we can all be more effective if we can avoid behavior that puts us in that “networker” category that is so negatively perceived.

*Julie Godshall Brown operates Godshall Staffing Services, a local full-service staffing firm in Greenville since 1968. Julie holds a bachelor's degree from Clemson University and a Masters in Human Resources from the University of South Carolina. She is married to Drew Brown and is the mother of two boys, ages 3 and 5.*