

Wisdom for Wednesday

Positive messages for daily living. Pass on the good feeling – forward this to your clients so they can reap the benefits as well.

The Art of Networking ...

Most people regard networking as a form of selling and think it is demeaning to have to promote themselves. They probably also feel it is pushy to initiate business opportunities when meeting new people. Truth is, networking is an art and with basic training anyone can demonstrate real flair and become a master. Done properly networking can be a very rewarding method of relationship building and lead generation, and check out the benefits:

- It is cheap (free actually);
- Easy (when you know what you are doing);
- Fun (you never know who you will meet and how they might enrich your life);
- And incredibly successful (once you reach the stage where you do it automatically).

Here are a few tips:

1. Know the key players

Never attend any meeting or function without doing your homework – you can't talk intelligently unless you know what you are talking about and have some point of connection. Know who will be there: what role they play; industry standing; product base; their competition; areas you can complement them; and be informed about hot industry topics.

2. Be interesting and knowledgeable

Don't risk being a bore or smartass. Keep abreast of the news and equipped with knowledgeable questions about other people and/or their business – it gives them the opportunity to expound and think you are both interesting and a good listener.

3. Make a good first impression

First impressions are everything – yours should be one of relaxed confidence. Breathe deep, stand tall, make eye contact and smile. You are not alone - most people are uncomfortable meeting new people in a foreign environment – it is stressful for everyone.

4. Market yourself

Prepare a short, snappy one-liner to introduce yourself: your name, what you do, industry and any other important information. No more than you could put on the back of a business card. Practice until you get it perfect. And have your business card ready to hand over.

5. You, you, you not me, me, me

People love to talk about themselves. Ask leading questions. Listen, you may learn something important and you'll leave them with the impression that it was great talking with you.

6. Timing

Try for at least five minute with each person – enough to make a connection. If they start fidgeting - leave gracefully. Either: "Please excuse me. I see someone I need to catch up with. It's been great speaking with you." Or, if it's a VIP: "I don't want to monopolise your time. There must be lots of other people waiting to speak to you." Be discreet and discerning.

7. Follow up and follow through

Do what you said you would do - immediately. Follow up with a quick note to say how much you enjoyed the connection and if you promised information make sure you send it. It also serves to remind them of who you are and what you do.

8. Don't let them drop off the radar

See this effort as an investment. They are probably happy with their current suppliers but things change – who knows what will happen in the future.

Lynette Davies