3 Secrets to Effective Networking

Career Development

I’m sure you’re often told to network, but what does that mean? And how do you do it effectively? This month’s column will provide tips and tricks for effective networking.

The main purpose of networking should be to genuinely connect with people. You are cultivating relationships because you want to connect with others, not because they may benefit you in the future. It is authentic, not opportunistic.

Should you ever need to call on your network if you’re job hunting or need a referral or any favor, you will be very thankful that you took an interest in people as human beings, not as a commodity to be leveraged.

You can tap into your network without feeling like you’re using them because you genuinely care about these people and you’ve shown that in the past by checking in for no reason other than to check in. Of course, if someone in your network needs assistance and you can help, you should assist because that, too, is part of weaving real relationships.

Here’s how to become a networking master.

1. Create your network

First, let’s start with who makes up your network. Your network is comprised of all the people in your life from all walks of life. Your family and friends are obvious members of your network. They are particularly helpful because they often know you best.

Former and current colleagues are integral people in your network because they know your work ethic and style. When former classmates are part of your network, you benefit from the education and

experiences that you share with them.

If you join an association, society, or club, or even just go to events, you'll meet people with similar interests who will become part of your network. Your network can be built anywhere, including at places like your local coffee shop. You never know where you'll meet someone who will become an invaluable connection.

One of the best places to build your network is at local ACC events. Find your local chapter here and meet other in-house counsel.

2. Practice your people skills

Now that you know who can comprise your network, how do you network? There are numerous ways to connect. You can meet in person or get in touch by phone. If you're more introverted than extroverted and find in-person or verbal networking difficult, fear not. The beginning stages of networking can still be done over email.

But challenge yourself to practice your people skills in less high-pressure settings. It can be as simple as making conversation with your server when you go out to dinner. Not only might you have a nice conversation, but you will practice your small talk with a stranger to aid in your networking. That server could even become part of your network.

3. Stay connected

In addition to traditional networking, you can also stay connected through LinkedIn, text messages, or any variety of ways that the technology of 2019 offers.

LinkedIn can be quite an effective way to network professionally, especially if you take some steps to maximize its impact. First, create a robust profile that tells the story of your career. Think of your LinkedIn profile as a social media resume. Keep your profile up to date.

Additionally, when building your LinkedIn connections, cast a wide net. Do your best to make sure profiles are real and legitimate, but accept and send invitations liberally because the whole point of LinkedIn is to connect and network. When your profile and connections are built up, regularly share valuable and appropriate content, meaning professional information.

LinkedIn is not Facebook. It is a professional network and your content should reflect that. It's also important to engage with others' posts, react to them, comment on them, and share them. LinkedIn is one giant network aimed at professionals, so it is a great place to nurture your own network.

Final thoughts

Networking has become somewhat of an intimidating concept because it's presented as invaluable and necessary to the point of seeming impossible to accomplish perfectly. However, it does not have to be perfect, and it does not have to be as complicated as it seems to be portrayed.

Simply make sure your interactions with members of your network are authentic. Wish someone a happy birthday. Check in on someone's family member who has been ill. Ask how someone's kids are. Networking is, at its heart, building relationships.

My grandfather and mother always told me that every person has a story. Thus, connect with people to learn their stories. The networking will naturally follow and, before you know it, your human connections will form a robust labyrinth of resources.

Discover how to get more involved with your local ACC Chapter.

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