

The Networking Factor is the second in a series of guides, pocket manuals, CDs and audio products that will help you to develop yourself for your ultimate success.

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the Networking Factor

*10 steps for effective
networking*

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by Kate Atkin

Before You Network

*'Would you please tell me which way to go?'
Alice asks the Cheshire cat.*

*'That depends a good deal on where you want to get
to,' replies the cat.*

'I don't much care where ...' Alice says.

'Then it doesn't matter which way you go,' says the cat.

*'... so long as I get somewhere,' added Alice, by way of
an explanation.*

*'Oh, you're sure to do that,' said the cat
'if you only walk long enough'*

*From Alice in Wonderland
by Lewis Carroll*

Rather than wandering aimlessly, the process of effective networking starts before you go to an event.

This pocket guide provides you with tried, tested and proven strategies to help you network more effectively.

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What is Networking?

'Networking' is a buzzword used with increasing frequency in the business world meaning to generate sales.

In my opinion networking is a label for something we all do all the time in our everyday lives – meeting and talking to other people whilst looking out for opportunities to help others and to be helped by them.

This guide refers mainly to those formal networking situations such as conferences, business events and evening meetings. But don't wait for the formal occasions – keep an eye out for the chance to help others at all times.

It happens whenever and wherever you are. It might be a chat by the school gates, a social gathering, or even while out shopping ... that's networking!

“Man is a goal-seeking animal. His life only has meaning if he is reaching out and striving for his goals.”

Aristotle

Networking Factor I

What are Your Objectives?

Why are you networking?

You improve the chance of spending your time effectively and achieving the results you want if you think about your objectives in advance.

Spend some time thinking about why you are networking and decide in advance what you want to achieve by the end of the event.

I'm going networking to meet people – *why?*

I'm going to get new business – *what type?*
Leads, orders, suppliers or purchasers?

I'm going just to see who is there –
who can I offer advice or help to?

If you attend a networking event with the mindset “*what can I get from this?*” you may come across as someone pouncing on the unsuspecting person, like a shark preying on the minnows.

Instead, go with the mindset of “*what can I do for you?*”. Look for the opportunities for you to help others. Sooner or later the law of reciprocity will apply.

Note of caution – we have all been on the receiving end of someone who is just out to sell and not interested in anyone who isn't buying. Those you talk to might not buy from you, but they may know someone who will.

I was once passed over at a networking meeting by a lady who introduced herself as a confidence coach, when she discovered we were in similar businesses she rapidly departed saying “oh, I’ve met too many like you already”. What she didn’t stay to find out was that I had just been speaking to a gentleman who was looking for a coach for his teenage daughter. A missed opportunity for her!

ACTIONS

- Have some business cards
- Decide in advance why you are networking
- Identify people you want to meet
and
- What you will say when you meet them

NB keep your mind open for how you can help others

“Be true to your work, your word and your friend.”

Henry David Thoreau

Networking Factor 2

Business Card Etiquette

Take your business cards with you

There are still people who go to formal networking events without business cards... have some!

There are many places you can get instant cards printed. Use these to print a pre-designed card if you don’t have any professionally printed ones – though the cost of professional ones has reduced since I first wrote this guide.

Include your name, telephone number, email and web address on the card... as well as what you do!

Use the back of the card for additional information about your business/service and the benefits for those doing business with you.

Consider where you are going to keep them. Which pocket will you place them in? Is it easily accessible? When you are holding a drink which hand will be free and can it easily reach the cards?

Keep your cards in one pocket and those you receive the other; this will avoid handing over the wrong card... I’ve seen it done!

When giving out your business cards, know the etiquette if you are doing business internationally. In the UK we tend to hand our cards out at the end of a meeting in a casual fashion. It varies from culture to culture how revered the card is, when and how to hand them over, so do your research first!

Take your business cards everywhere, even to a social function... just in case (you don’t have to hand them out).

Business cards are one of the first impressions you give to others of your business. Take time to think about the impression you wish to make.

If your cards say what you do, how to contact you and the benefits you offer, they may result in business coming your way.

ACTIONS

- Have some business cards
- Carry them with you
- Use the back as well as the front
- Write on the back of the ones you receive where and when you met, and what you promised to do

Networking Factor 3

What you Wear

To dress appropriately... or break with convention?

Find out the dress code in advance. Is it business dress or a casual occasion?

'Smart casual' is generally accepted to mean no tie or jacket for men. It's more difficult to define for ladies, but I tend to opt for trousers rather than a skirt or dress. If you intend to wear jeans, find out if they are acceptable.

'Black tie' refers to a dinner jacket for men (tuxedo) and usually a long dress for ladies, though these days a cocktail dress is often acceptable.

Complying with the dress code isn't always necessary, but be aware of the statement you will make if you break with convention. It's your choice.

I once saw a keynote speaker attend a business conference in a denim shirt and jeans. As he later mentioned in his speech, it was his company's uniform so very appropriate. I've also seen a keynote speaker at an evening dinner who hadn't known in advance that it was black tie. Although he made light of it, it was obvious he was uncomfortable.

There are consultants who offer advice on which colours and styles suit you. This service isn't just for women; it's equally applicable to men and well worth the cost, as afterwards your wardrobe evolves to take on a new mix and match quality (you may find you look younger and slimmer too!).

What you wear has an impact not only on those who see you; it directly affects how you feel about yourself. Clothes make a statement, so know the impression you want to make and ensure it is the one that others receive.

ACTIONS

- Find out the dress code in advance
- Wear something you feel good in
- Seek advice on what suits you

“If you want to go somewhere, it is best to find someone who has already been there.”

Robert Kiyosaki

Networking Factor 4

The Handshake

Be the first to offer your hand

This is likely to be the only time you make physical contact with someone you are talking to and it counts!

Your handshake should be firm, not squishy or like a bit of limp lettuce (apologies to crispy icebergs).

Note there are cultural differences, for example in Malaysia a limp handshake is the norm and in Uganda using both hands is a sign of respect.

When shaking hands the web of your thumb should just brush with the web of the other person's thumb. Do not take a vice-like hold and refuse to let go – this will almost certainly put off your potential business contact.

A handshake is sometimes used as a power play – my preference is to be on equal terms with everyone, and not to try to outdo the other person by placing a hand on top.

ACTIONS

- Get feedback from a friend on your handshake
- Offer your hand out confidently
- Keep it short and sweet

Networking Factor 5

Make Eye Contact

A glance versus a stare

Eye contact is another way in which we humans assess each other – so make some!

If you wear glasses make sure you have put on your plain specs and not the trendy tinted or mirrored version. There is nothing more frustrating than trying to make eye contact with a mirror or smoke screen.

Either look the person directly in the eye for a second or, if you find this too uncomfortable, look at the bridge of their nose as it's hard for them to tell whether you are focused on their eyes or not.

Some people find it easier than others to make eye contact. You don't need to stare at the other person; I do make a plea to at least look in their direction!

ACTIONS

- Look at the person you are talking to
- Notice what shop assistants do and the effect it has – some are good at this and some are appalling!
- Avoid tinted glasses

Networking Factor 6

How you Speak

Be aware of your voice

The way you speak will speak volumes about you to others.

I think accents are lovely and would encourage you to keep your natural accent as it adds richness to your voice and can help distinguish you from others. If you have a strong accent be prepared to slow down your rate of speech so others can understand you.

Raise your voice if you know you speak quietly, in the hubbub of networking you may not be heard.

Lower it a little if you know you have a loud voice to be considerate to others.

Speak clearly in a steady, but not too slow, pace (a good average to aim for is 150 words a minute).

ACTIONS

- Breathe deeply to slow down your rate of speech
- Speak clearly and at an appropriate volume

Networking Factor 7

Know your Elevator Pitch

Tell them what you do

The elevator pitch is so called because it encourages you to say what your business does, or what you do, in the time it takes an elevator to travel from the ground floor to the top of a building. Your elevator pitch should last a maximum of 30 seconds.

Be specific when stating what you do – ‘I’m in sales’ or ‘I offer garden services’ doesn’t say enough. ‘I supply XYZ to people who have a need to . . .’ or ‘I transform gardens into those my clients dream of’ or ‘I cut lawns, weed borders and do all the gardening jobs you love to hate’.

Include benefits – what does buying your product or service result in the client having?

Keep it simple – don’t use long complicated words which results in people asking ‘what does that mean?’

Give reasons for people to buy your product or service and also suggest what might happen if they don’t.

Include both negative and positive sides to your services. For example ‘I help individuals improve themselves and get out of a rut’ (coaching).

Be wary of over using your elevator pitch. This can come across as being clever and just trotted out for the sake of having one.

The essential element is to be natural.

So why is an elevator pitch important?

Knowing your elevator pitch helps you be clear in your own mind what business you are in – even if you don’t say it aloud when you are at networking events.

ACTIONS

- Identify what business you are in
- What are the benefits for those who buy your goods or services?
- Know your elevator pitch

Networking Factor 8

Work the Room

Make meaningful contact with as many people as you can

Before you attend an event you will have thought about the people you wish to meet. Pick up a list of those present if one is available and take a few moments to scan it and see whom you would like to meet.

Once you have identified someone, a good way to break the ice is to ask another person if they know him or her – and that gives you a conversation starter with a stranger!

Other conversation starters:

Hello, do you mind if I join you...?

I couldn't help overhearing...

It's a bit crowded/quiet here...

What did you think of the last speaker...?

What do you think of the conference...?

Then move into the “*what do you do*” discussion.

Moving on

If it's a formal networking situation thank the person you are talking to and say that you would like to circulate.

It's ok to politely excuse yourself if you want to move on – after all it is an event for meeting people.

If you want to talk in more detail for an in depth business discussion, suggest meeting for a separate lunch or coffee, whichever is more appropriate.

If you find yourself stuck with one person and feel unable to excuse yourself to circulate, what can you do? Here are a few suggestions: Ask if they know X and offer to introduce them – then leave promptly after the introduction. If you have spotted someone else to talk to, ask if they would like to accompany you. Invite them to top up their drink with you and either along the way, or while you are refilling your glasses, look for a suitable time to excuse yourself!

ACTIONS

- Look for those you would like to meet
- Start up conversations on a non-business topic
- Excuse yourself and move on to meet others
- Conduct in-depth business discussions at a separate meeting

“A friendship founded on business is better than a business founded on friendship.”

John D. Rockefeller

Networking Factor 9

Follow Up

After the event

Do what you have said you will.

The Business Cards

Write on the back of the cards you have received any specific promises you have made at the time of receiving the card.

After the meeting take all the cards out of your pocket and write the date, event and any other relevant information on the back of each one before filing them away.

By email – do not send your business information unless you have agreed to do so. A short ‘pleased to meet you’ email is often well received. Do make sure your web address and contact details are on the bottom of your message.

By telephone – if you would like to meet up with the person again then a phone call will do the trick rather than an email. To get past the gatekeeper (e.g. secretary or PA), mention the fact that you met at an event a couple of days ago and spoke about X.

By letter – these stand out much more now than they used to due to the increased use of email. Letters have a more personal touch, especially if you have handwritten a small comment.

If you are looking for further business discussions say so.

ACTIONS

- Write the date and event you met on the back of business cards you receive
- Follow up with any information you promised at the time
- Send a short ‘pleased to meet you’ message

Networking Factor 10

Keeping in Touch

It often takes months or years to generate business from a new client

As the adage goes “people buy people” and so it is with keeping in touch. A personal message helps to cement a relationship rather than the occasional email.

A card at Christmas is not sufficient to generate business from a prospective client. You need to find a way to keep your business in their mind without being intrusive. Not an easy task when we are all so busy these days.

Email newsletters (ezines) and blogs (on-line diaries) are increasingly common and consequently are often not read because people simply do not have the time. If you are sending them out, keep them short, to the point and of benefit to the reader.

Cards, ezines and blogs are very useful for helping keep your name in the minds of a prospect, but do not confuse them with marketing for new business.

Find a special reason to get in touch, such as sending out a newspaper cutting appropriate to their line of work or writing to congratulate them if you see an article about their business in the newspaper.

Other ways are to offer something of benefit to your prospect so they can try your product or service without any commitment. You might offer a free trial, or hold an evening seminar.

As Robert Cialdini says in his excellent book ‘Influence: a Science and Practice’, the law of reciprocity comes into force. So giving something for nothing often ends up not being for nothing after all!

ACTIONS

- Offer your hand out confidently
- Personalise your contact
- Judge the frequency depending on the prospect
- Use ezines and blogs

“It’s all about people. It’s about networking and being nice to people and not burning any bridges.”

Mike Davidson

10 Steps for Effective Networking

1. What are your objectives?
2. Have some business cards
3. Choose what you wear
4. Have a firm handshake
5. Make eye contact
6. Be aware of how you speak
7. Know your elevator pitch
8. Work the room
9. Follow Up
10. Keep in touch

The key to successful networking lies in getting out there and doing it!

Recommended Reading

Power Networking

Donna Fisher & Sandy Vilas
1-885167-47-4

Influence – science and practice

Robert B Cialdini
0-321-01147-3

The Luck Factor

Dr Richard Wiseman
0-7126-2388-4

Mindstore for Life

Jack Black
ISBN 0-7225-3264-4

The Success Principles

Jack Canfield
ISBN 0-00-719508-7

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People

Stephen R. Covey
ISBN 0-684-85839-8

The Confident Manager

Kate Atkin
ISBN 978-1-906316-15-0

What Others Say ...

'As a graduate civil engineer, I have always been told that networking is an important aspect for my professional and personal life. I never really understood what networking was. Your presentation hit the spot. It was lively, interesting and inspiring. As many of the delegates including myself have never covered this topic before, we all found your 'steps to networking' extremely valuable. Thank you for an exceptional presentation and bringing our 2-day seminar on interpersonal skills to a close with a big bang.'

Institution of Civil Engineers

'Your Networking Event was, without a doubt, one of the most profitable evenings of my business career.... Two of the people I met that evening have since helped me to transform how my business operates - and we have not looked back since. I really couldn't believe that as I walked out of the door that night I had just acquired a complete "Networking Toolkit". Being armed with this valuable knowledge has enabled me to come across with greater confidence and professionalism and as a result I find I am far more successful. For me "Networking" has now been transformed into a "Business Generation" phenomenon - and I just can't stop!'

Ian McKendrick, MD CambiNet

About the Author

Kate Atkin was born in Lincolnshire and grew up on a farm.

After the death of her older sister she left her job with Barclays Bank to backpack around Australia and New Zealand. Travelling alone over those months, Kate learnt how to make friends quickly with other travellers and to expect the unexpected.

More importantly, she found an inner strength, a sense of self-belief and confidence she hadn't had before.

On her return Kate rejoined Barclays and in 1997 moved to their training team. In September 2000 she established her own training business, Aspire 2. A bold step some said, but as Kate puts it 'there was an inner drive and it was just something I knew I had to do'.

Her clients come through word of mouth and networking. For Kate the personal touch is essential.

This booklet is the culmination of many years of networking experience. Using these tips, focusing on the relationship and having the mind-set of "what can I do for you?" will ensure your networking is effective.

