

Networking - It's Important!

By Chuck And Sue DeFiore

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Networking opportunities are everywhere. Don't let them pass you by.

1. Recognize that there is more to networking than greeting people. Develop a step-by-step plan for how you'll build relationships and how you can effectively tell your story. Don't forget your 30 second commercial to tell your story.
2. Zero in on specific groups of people. Who are the ideal prospects for your business? Do they live nearby? What activities do they participate in? Try networking groups meetings. For those of us in lease purchasing we network with real estate agents, accountants, financial planners, and a multitude of others.
3. Determine where you'll be most likely to find your ideal prospects. Do they belong to specific organizations or associations? Do they frequent particular events, performances or recreational facilities? Again, for those of us in lease purchasing, investors, buyers and sellers are just the beginning.
4. Identify organizations, events, professional groups and social clubs whose members meet your profile characteristics, and get involved. Get to know people, and let them know what you do. Volunteer for committees, attend conferences, and maximize opportunities that might spin off from the formal sessions. For those of you in lease purchasing, and even other businesses, become an expert. Give seminars, speeches, write articles. Become involved and get your name out there.
5. Work on your ability to make small talk. Have some prepared topics in mind—current events, sports, vacation plans. And be sure to ask open-ended questions of the other person like "What is it you enjoy most about your work, or where you live or your free time?" Remember, too, that having a good conversation depends greatly on being an active, courteous listener. Again, your thirty second commercial is a must. And let's emphasize again being a good and emphatic listener.
6. Explore organizations dedicated to business networking. Chambers of commerce, tenant associations and networking clubs offer opportunities for you to meet and greet. Look for the groups in your area. Many times your local paper has a certain day of the week that lists all of these types of meetings. If you don't see it, call your paper and ask about it.
7. Look for partners. Specifically, look for other businesses that complement what you do and might be a good source of referrals. Again, those of us in lease purchasing has it easy. We have a ton of people to work with. For those of you in other businesses, think of who would complement your

business. If you are a travel agent, how about hotels, spas; a flower shop, what about bridal shops, catering services, party planners... you get the idea.

8. Don't look at networking as a sales opportunity. Instead, look at it as a reconnaissance mission—a chance for you to learn something and enjoy the scenery. There is a proper time and place for sales calls. This is a very important point. Read it over and over again. Networking is not sales.

9. Make a habit of being patient, polite and friendly to people, whether or not you're in an "orchestrated" setting. This is just good business behavior. If you are going to run a business, at least a successful one, these are just some of the characteristics and behavior you will need to employ.

10. Finally, do something constructive with the names and information you've gathered. Stay in touch with the most meaningful contacts. Again, those of us in lease purchasing know the importance of following up and have numerous ways to do so. For those of you in other types of business develop a few types of follow methods, phone, fax, newsletter, brochure, card and letter.

Referrals, introductions and contacts that simply come by chance are like gifts. Be sure to thank anyone who helps you network, and when appropriate pay a nice referral fee. Your ability to be seen as a giver rather than a taker will spread the word that you are someone with whom people want to do business.

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