

Casual Networking

By Ramona Creel

Casual Networking

Ramona Creel
ramona@onlineorganizing.com

OnlineOrganizing.com <http://www.onlineorganizing.com>

What comes to mind when you think of networking -- cocktail parties? Shaking hands and exchanging business cards at a Chamber of Commerce events? Endless lines of people anxious to make you a customer? Sweaty palms and panic?

Networking is not about how many business cards you can collect -- it's about building a long-term and mutually beneficial RELATIONSHIP with another business person. And it doesn't have to be painful or forced! When you do it the right way -- networking is as natural as starting up a casual conversation. Let me show you how...

THE SCENE: MY CHIROPRACTOR'S OFFICE

So I'm reading a magazine in the waiting room at my chiropractor's office -- I'm exceptionally early for an appointment. Another patient walks in -- a woman named Susan that I've seen there several times before but never spoken to. She sits down and smiles, and we strike up a non-business conversation. We talk a little about chiropractic, traffic (always a popular topic in Atlanta!), and I eventually ask what she does for a living. It turns out that Susan is a personal coach. I tell her that I'm a Professional Organizer and we spend the rest of my waiting time comparing our experiences with clients.

The important point to note here is that our business relationship is starting out as a personal one -- just like any other casual acquaintance. You already know how to do this with people -- you start up informal conversations every day of your life. But the minute you attach the term "network" to your actions, you also attach a boatload of pre-conceptions and EXPECTATIONS. Don't think about where this relationship will lead 5 years down the road -- just be friendly and interested.

MAKING THE CONNECTION

As the receptionist calls my name for my appointment, I ask Susan for some of her business cards. I tell her that many of my clients are in need of longer term help with their goals than I'm able to give -- and would she mind if I referred folks to her when a need arises. It's highly unlikely that Susan will turn me down, unless she is just overwhelmed with clients. She graciously accepts my offer, and makes the same in return. We exchange business cards and part ways.

Notice that I did not say to Susan, "Send me your clients who need to get better organized." Instead, I offered to do something for her. Networking isn't about what you can get, it's about what you have to give. If you don't have a referral for that person, suggest an interesting book or article

and offer to call or e-mail with the information. Or offer to hook the person up with another professional you know who might also be a good gateopener. But don't expect anything in return -- the minute you think, "What's in it for me?" you kill the relationship.

KNOW YOUR NETWORK

I got back to my office later that day and called around to a few other friends I knew who either were coaches or had worked with coaches. Susan's name came up several times, and everyone I spoke to sung her praises. This is important to me -- I don't want to ruin my reputation by referring my clients to someone who provides poor customer service. Be sure to check on the people in your network before sending your clients their way. naive networking can be worse than no networking at all!

FOLLOW THROUGH

I sent Susan a quick note that afternoon telling her how nice it was to talk to her. I also included referrals for two clients who had been looking for a good personal coach. It's important that you follow-up quickly when you make a new acquaintance. You will really stand out as a conscientious individual if you do what you say you will do when you say you will do it (isn't it sad that it's not the norm?!) They say that you never have a second chance to make a first impression, but that's not always true. Sometimes, the impression that sticks with a person is the one that comes after your follow-up note or call.

BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIP

It's not required that you refer clients to every networking contact you have. Whether I send any work Susan's way or not, I've laid the foundation for a long and prosperous relationship. I keep in touch with Susan by clipping articles that might interest her, letting her know of business functions that she may want to attend, and getting together for coffee every once in awhile. She thinks fondly of me because I go out of my way for her. And it has paid off handsomely.

In the year and a half that we have known each other, Susan has sent me 4 new clients, hooked me up with at least a dozen great gateopeners, and given me countless suggestions for growing and expanding my business. Each new person with whom you strike up a conversation has the potential of doubling or tripling your network over time. That's what casual networking is all about.

You must include the following resource box when publishing this article:

Ramona Creel is a Professional Organizer and the founder of [OnlineOrganizing.com](http://www.onlineorganizing.com) -- a web-based one-stop shop offering everything that you need to get organized at home or at work. At [OnlineOrganizing.com](http://www.onlineorganizing.com), you may get a referral to an organizer near you, shop for the latest organizing products, get tons of free tips, and even learn how to become a professional organizer or build your existing organizing business. And if you would like to read more articles about organizing your life or building your business, get a free subscription to the "Get Organized" and "Organized For A Living" newsletters. Please visit <http://www.onlineorganizing.com> or contact Ramona directly at <mailto:ramona@onlineorganizing.com> for more information.

[Get-Articles.com](http://www.getarticles.com) : 1000's of reprintable business and internet marketing-related articles.

[Submit your article for reprint.](#)