

Networking

A New Approach

BY NATALIE EVE TIMMONS

I want to share with you a networking approach that is very different from the old school of networking. The old approach tells you to meet as many people in the room as possible, hand them your business card, and pitch them your product or service.

With this concept of networking it's no wonder you run for cover when your boss asks for volunteers to attend the local Business After Hours event. You think to yourself, "Not me, I can't stand those events! I'm not a sales person. How do I sell people I don't even know?"

All this negative talk races through your mind, because some where along the way you equated networking with salesmanship. However, NETWORKING IS NOT SELLING. Your goal in networking is not to make a sale, but to make a friend. It sounds a bit trite, but it is true. *People prefer to do business with people they know and trust.*

The Trust Bank

An article published in the Public Relations Journal called *Community Relations: New Approaches to Building Consensus* (October 1989), Mary Lowengard basically says that you should think of each relationship-building opportunity as a "deposit" that you make into a "trust bank." Just like in a regular bank where you make deposits to improve your financial position, you make deposits into your trust bank to strengthen your company's position in the community and with your customers.

So, when you work on building rela-



tionships through networking you are making deposits into your "trust bank." If you've been making regular deposits into your trust bank, then the support will be there when you need donations for your annual campaign, when a big competitor rolls into town, or when a crisis occurs.

Benefits of Networking

The benefits of building relationships and networking are many and include:

- builds credibility
- fosters a sense of trust
- keeps your customers & prospects informed of your programs and services
- makes you available to answer troubling questions or address erroneous thinking before a problem escalates
- strengthens your community
- promotes information and resource sharing
- enhances a company's marketing & public relations programs.
- broadens the company's access to the community and vice versa.

Natural Networkers

I recently met someone I consider to be a natural pro at networking at every available opportunity. His name is Father Lally and he is responsible for the non-profit Lawrence Hispanic Youth Center and the Paulist Hispanic Evangelization Program in Lawrence, MA. In my opinion the Father has a wonderful way of dropping his latest "need" into a conversation. It doesn't matter whether it is a business meeting, a chance greeting or a church sermon.

In his warm and personable way, you'll discover that Father Lally needs more used bicycles for the Center's kids, that he would greatly appreciate the name of an electrician who would donate his services, or that he needs lumber donated for the building of a church in the Dominican Republic.

Natural networkers can also be found throughout the halls of your company. Listen for the staffer who when asked, "How's it going?" And, replies not just with, "Fine." But says, "It's been crazy, man. We just rolled out our new product line and can't keep up with the orders!" Or, the one who says, "Great! I just finished presenting my report to management and they really were impressed!"

Networking Tips

So what if you're not a natural? Here are some tips for becoming a better networker:

- Focus on giving, not getting. If you want to get business, you have to give business. If you want to get referrals, give referrals. *Givers gain.*
- Focus on listening not talking. Ask lots of questions. Consider the 5 "W" questions: who, what, where, when & why.
- If you're not comfortable in crowds, network one-on-one with people in your horizontal network (people who serve the same customers you do, but aren't competitors).

The relationship building approach to networking is a "work smarter not harder" approach. If you're using networking to "sell," then every networking opportunity is going to be work --hard work. The beauty of the relationship-building approach is that overtime your network actually starts *doing the work* for you!

Communications Coach Inc.

Marketing · Graphic Design

(603) 642-4949 · Fax (603) 642-9411

Natalie@ComCoach.net · www.ComCoach.net

Coaching You to Success!