



## FREE BUSINESS NETWORKING SKILLS

By Doug Stanearth, CEO of The Leader's Institute

Word-of-mouth advertising is one of the cheapest and most effective types of advertising your company can invest in, but how do we generate this elusive type of advertising? Most experts in the area will say, "Get out and 'network'." So we go to a Chamber of Commerce business card exchange, a small business networking event, or any other peer to peer meet and greet with dozens or even hundreds of other people trying to promote their company or service, and we attempt to promote our company or service as well. Very few people come to these business card exchanges to buy things. The odds seem to be stacked against from the beginning, so is it any wonder why most of us come back from these networking functions thinking that we just wasted an hour or two?

It doesn't have to be that way. By making just a few simple changes to our approach, we can become a center of influence in any room and in effect, generate significant word of mouth advertising. One of the first things that we have to realize, though, is what 'networking' actually is and what it is not. Networking IS NOT selling. (If you are in a MLM system, pay close attention here!) If we know 99% of the people at a networking function are there to promote their own product or service (not buy from us,) and we try to sell our product or service to them, we are likely to frustrate (and bore) ourselves and the people we are talking with. One of the biggest mistakes that people make is that once we get even a hint of interest from the person we are talking to, the sales person FANGS (MLM fangs) come out. We practically beat our new acquaintance over the head with what we do, and how great we are, and why they should buy from us. All we are doing in a situation like this is pushing our prospect away.

Networking IS increasing our sphere of influence in order to promote our product or service to this sphere of influence at a future time. People do business with and refer people to people they, know, like, and trust (peer to peer networking.) So our goal during a networking function is not to sell, but to get more people to know us, like us, and trust us. That way, they are more likely to buy from us in the future or refer people to us. One way to get people to know us, like us, and trust us more is to help them get what they want.

People like other people who are interested in them. The most important topic to anyone you are speaking to is himself or herself. And since they are at the meeting to promote their product or service, then if we help them do that better, they are going to like and trust us more. The following questions are things that you can ask someone at a networking function that will get them to open up to you and tell you about

themselves:

- What is your name? Obviously a first question.
- What do you do? Still nothing out of the ordinary.
- Do you travel much? What territory do you work in? Any question about location.
- What do you like most about what you do? Keeps the conversation positive and gives you more insight about the person and his/her company.
- What makes you or your company unique or different from your competition? Let them brag.
- What are some of your accomplishments or things you are proud of? Let them brag more.
- How would I know if someone I was talking to would be a good prospect for you? This one question can make you more money than any other you can ask.

These questions will help you really get to know the person and what he or she can do. With this type of information at your fingertips (and it is a good idea to write the information down-possible on the back of a business card,) as you network, eventually you will come across someone who would be a good prospect for that person. The moment you introduce those two people, you become a center of influence in that room. Do this just a couple of times, and the word will spread very quickly about how YOU are the person that everyone needs to know.

What makes this process so successful is the third party endorsement. The person who you are helping to promote his or her product or service is no longer struggling to find a warm prospect, now they are receiving a third party endorsement from you. That gives that person tremendous credibility to the prospect. You are helping both parties. These people tend to remember this type of help, and they return the favor ten-fold.

Eventually, you'll walk into a room, and people you have never even met before will begin bringing prospects to you. The key to making this process work is consistency and the ability to catalogue information about the people you meet. If you create a system that works for you, you will dramatically increase the word-of-mouth advertising about your company.

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