

Rainmaking

Growing a Multifaceted Network

SUSAN SALTONSTALL DUNCAN | When considering how to network, one of the first things to remember is that networking is *not* selling. Networking is about building relationships and sharing information. It is a two-way interaction in which both parties give and receive value.

Selling, by contrast, is the process of connecting your expertise and services with a prospect's articulated need and then going after the business. When you get selling out of your head and think about interacting instead, you'll realize how far and wide the existing and potential members of your network really extend. From there, you can proactively work on strengthening current relationships and building new ones appropriately. Here are key how-tos for building and nurturing your network to strengthen your practice base.

Identify and Deepen Existing Relationships

Everyone has a network—a group of people who are linked to them in some way. In addition to your business colleagues and clients, your network will include family members,

personal friends and acquaintances, your children's teachers, coaches and friends' parents, and others from your personal, civic, political, religious and professional circles. These are all people who can potentially help you with information, advice, resources and referrals.

If you haven't already done so, build a database of all your contacts, using an automated tool like Microsoft Outlook. Include as much information as you can about each individual. For example, in addition to the essential contact information, set up fields for the type of relationship you have, how you met this person, and any personal data you have on hand—birthday, hobbies, special interests and the like.

Review your database and think about how and how often you should be communicating with specific contacts. Remember that if you don't keep yourself on their radar screens, your contacts probably won't be thinking about you. After you have identified 10 or 20 priority contacts that might be particularly helpful, contact at least one of these people per week, preferably by phone, and if

appropriate, follow up with an in-person meeting.

Because networking is about communicating and building trusting relationships, your first goal is to ask, listen and learn. You want to build rapport and look for areas of mutual interest and need.

Expand Your Contact Base through Targeted Networking

Build your network further by identifying additional individuals who might help you achieve your business goals. These could be peers in outside firms, other co-workers within your firm, new clients, referral sources, former classmates, prospective clients, vendors or consultants. They could be people you've already met (even if briefly) or people to whom you'd like to be introduced.

Decide where and how you will meet or further network with these individuals. Ask mutual acquaintances or peers where they are likely to interact with your targeted contacts. Find out whether the contacts plan to attend upcoming meetings or other events and put those on your calendar. These forums may include business group events, lawyer functions, industry and trade association meetings, social activities, alumnae events, charitable fund-raisers, political initiatives and civic forums.

In some instances, you may do better to arrange a more personal networking engagement by getting together with just one or two con-



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tacts. Networking can also be done on the phone, via e-mail or in online discussion groups. Regardless of the forum, every interaction you have with someone else is a form of networking. As a result, always be thoughtful when interacting with others. Make each contact genuine and meaningful. Don't make negative impressions by looking like you're participating in a conversation or event just to sell your services.

Be Prepared and Focused During Networking Events

Before attending any event, whether it's a small luncheon meeting or a gathering with hundreds of people, set a few achievable goals for the interaction and write them down.

Think about who will be there, who you want to meet or speak with, and what you would like to find out about people. What do you hope to accomplish by attending this event? What existing contacts should you make a point of meeting up with? Who else do you want to meet at this event, and how will you seek them out and obtain an introduction?

When you enter the room, be prepared with an interesting self-introduction—a 15-second “elevator speech”—focusing not on what you have or want to sell but on what benefits and unique assets you offer clients and colleagues. You should also have some icebreaker openers at the ready. Your icebreakers might be questions or comments about the program you're attending, its sponsors or certain current events. Read the paper that day and focus on a few news items that might be of relevance to people attending this particular function.

To help ensure that you make a

good impression, here are additional tips for “working the room”:

- Have business cards and a pen easily accessible. Be sure to wear clothing with an internal or external pocket and an easy place to put your name tag.
- Don't turn away from or walk by someone without saying hello, especially if you've met the person before.
- Smile. Look friendly and welcoming. Give firm handshakes, and make and maintain eye contact. Stand tall but relaxed—body language counts.
- Branch out beyond people you already know. Look for someone standing alone, or an acquaintance who is with a group and can introduce you to others. Whether you are speaking with someone you just met or knew before, introduce the person to others as they approach.
- Be attentive when you are being introduced to someone. Visualize the person's name in writing or try to associate it with something or someone else that will help you remember it. Repeat the name during conversation.
- Be an active and avid listener. Don't interrupt or try to convince others of all you know or your point of view. Instead, focus on the other person's interests and concerns. People like to talk about themselves so let them do so.
- Don't hand out your card without first connecting with the person. Quality, not quantity, is the goal. When you receive a business card,

pause to look at it and see if there is anything that generates further discussion. Jot a note on the back to remind you of your conversation.

- Disengage effectively. Don't spend too much time with any one individual, even if you have found much to discuss with that person. Suggest a specific follow-up activity and date, and then move on. Always say goodbye to each person in a group.

Follow Up and Continue to Add Value

Add any relevant or promising new names to your contact database, with notes about where you met the person and the flow of your conversation. Then stay in touch. Within a few days of meeting or reconnecting with an important contact, send a handwritten note or e-mail or make a quick phone call. Follow through on anything you promised—information, leads or introductions. Keep thinking about ways in which you could be of personal or professional assistance, focusing on the individual's specific needs and areas of interest, not on selling your services.

Find a reason to communicate with those in your broader network at least every four months. As you do so, continue to look for ways to provide value by offering ideas, time, feedback and introductions. Help your contacts find solutions or opportunities, send articles or news clippings of interest to them, and remember personal dates, interests and hobbies. Many of your contacts will never become clients, but they may well provide leads and other valuable information that enhances your rainmaking success. LP