

Excerpted from Seal the Deal: The Essential Mindsets for Growing Your Professional Services Business (HRD Press, 2006)

What Is Networking?

In the beginning of this book I said that networking is the relational aspect of your business. It is connecting with others for the purpose of sharing resources, information, leads, referrals, ideas, and so on. Cultivating a working network of relationships is crucial to your business development system. Networking is about connecting, meeting people, collecting people. You are networking when you are

- Building your pipeline
- Connection-seeking with genuine interest in others
- Meeting people
- Talking to people and getting to know them better
- Getting out there and creating relationships of all kinds
- Asking to meet other people -- asking for introductions or at least requesting contact information and permission to use your contact as a reference
- Following up with someone you met in passing
- Applying or improving your manners, etiquette, and social graces
- Introducing people to each other with an eye to expanding others' networks
- Engaging in activities that yield human connection and interaction, not necessarily related to business
- Keeping in mind the Nine Mindsets of Networking
- Finding out what people do, where they do it, why they do it and what they want to do
- Interacting with people in a way that generates relatedness.

I particularly like the way Mary Foley describes it:

“Knowing how to network well can make or break your career. That’s how powerful it is, because that’s how powerful relationships are to your career. I’m not keen on the term “networking”. The problem is the word “work”. I mean how many times do you walk into a room full of people expecting to leave with actual work in hand such as a signed contract? It doesn’t happen! Why? Because before someone signs their name or hands over a check, there’s lots of getting to understand each other, lots of exchange, and making a connection. So, I say we rename “networking” to “netconnecting”. Meeting and getting to know new people is about gathering – netting – several good connections. Once you’ve connected, sharing business cards is simply the convenience of not having to write

down their contact information on a napkin.”¹

Networking is more than just netconnecting, though. It is more like netweaving, because you’ve got to weave together your connections -- perhaps we should call it netknitting, because you are knitting together people and resources and ideas for everyone’s mutual benefit. The more you can think in terms of weaving or knitting, the less working you’ll have to do!

Networking is the backdrop of the sales process. It informs your strategic target choices, it lubricates the wheels of progress, it cultivates the garden of possible leads. And you’ll make lots of new friends!

Nine Mindsets of Networking

1. It is a game, it is fun if you stay open to it. Start with who you know, find out who they know.
2. Become a connection-seeker ... if you are not already, make yourself driven to find connections. Connect people to each other, connect people to information, connect people into your life ... include them and they will include you.
3. It is about partnering: look for mutual benefit, ways to serve. Keep yourself operating from and inside of a spirit of partnership, collaboration and helpfulness.
4. Keep agendas clear and communicated up front. Include people in what you are up to...share, communicate. Be honest and check assumptions. Speak of that which is important to you.
5. Curiosity about what's possible: show genuine interest in others. Inquire as to what is important to others.
6. Six degrees of separation: everyone is on the squad -- no benchwarmers or spectators. Strengthen the strands of your web constantly. Nothing is a wasted interaction. Every moment is an opportunity for relatedness, every relatedness moment is a building block for your network. Every strand in your web adds strength to the fibers of your network and eventually you will find it working for you.
7. Safety/normalization/creating a comfortable atmosphere (there are three things all people want: to be respected, to be acknowledged, to be taken care of/well-served). Seek first to understand other people (like Stephen R. Covey says)

¹ Foley, Mary. 10 Bodacious Ways for a Bodacious Career. 2005. Bodacious! Books, Richmond. VA.

and be trustworthy.

8. Giver's gain...people want to help you, focus on helping them and it will come back to you.
9. Action. Networking is ongoing, not at events only. Never underestimate the power of informational interviews! Make calls, set up meetings, follow-up with everyone.

Checklist: Networking Actions

- List the categories in your life in which you know people (i.e., family, church, work, neighborhood, school, past employers, business associates, friends, associations or professional groups, those who provide services to you; your dentist, etc.)
- Make each category a separate page and list all the people you know in each category.
- In each category, choose the top three people you know best as your networking starters.
- Set up time to talk to or be with your network starters and tell them your vision.
- Ask your network starters who they know that you could talk to about your vision.
- Seek out every person your network starters referred you to and tell them your vision.
- Ask each of these people whom they know that you might talk to.
- Continue to work your way through your own network lists.
- Continue to follow up and meet people from your network starters networks.
- Tell everyone you meet what you are up to in your business, in your life.
- Tell everyone a clear profile of your ideal clients.
- Remember the Nine Mindsets of Networking during all of these interactions!
- Explore collaborative, partnering and alliance-building opportunities.
- Identify and list at least 10 people with whom you want to do a joint venture or other collaboration and have initial conversations with them about what that might look like.

Networking is an Outdated Term

Whatever you call it, you've got to master it to succeed in business and in life!

Networking is about connecting with others for the purpose of sharing resources, information, leads, referrals, ideas, etc. Cultivating a working network of relationships is crucial to your business development system. Networking is not only about connecting, but about meeting people, collecting people, introducing people, leveraging relationships. I particularly like the way Mary Foley (www.4-working-woman-business-coach.com) says it:

"Knowing how to network well can make or break your career. That's how powerful it is, because that's how powerful relationships are to your career. I'm not keen on the term "networking". The problem is the word "work". I mean how many times do you walk into a room full of people expecting to leave with actual work in hand such as a signed contract? It doesn't happen! Why? Because before someone signs their name or hands over a check, there's lots of getting to understand each other, lots of exchange, and making a connection. So, I say we rename "networking" to "netconnecting". Meeting and getting to know new people is about gathering - netting - several good connections. Once you've connected, sharing business cards is simply the convenience of not having to write down their contact information on a napkin."

I think it is more than just netconnecting, though. It is netweaving, because you've got to weave together your connections, and perhaps it is more like netknitting, because you are knitting together people and resources and ideas for everyone's mutual benefit. The more you can think in the context of weaving or knitting, the less working you'll have to do!

Networking is the backdrop of the sales process. It informs your strategic target choices, it lubricates the wheels of progress, it cultivates the garden of possible leads. Besides, you'll make lots of new friends! Happy netknitting!

Distinguishing Between Networking, Marketing, And Sales

Networking + Marketing + Sales = \$\$\$\$

People often misuse the term Marketing to be an all-encompassing concept to mean everything from press, exposure, pricing, referrals, networking and branding to sales, business development, rainmaking, and getting new clients. Marketing is often broadly used to refer to the act of getting your message/product/service to market as well as to define the materials and design of your image. I'd like to try to un-coggle the three terms for you. Once you have a clear understanding of the distinctions between the three main concepts of networking, marketing, and sales, you will be able to manage your time so that you

are leveraging each piece of this critical trinity to get to the sweet spot where deals are sealed!

So, in a nutshell, Networking is about Relation, Marketing is about Preparation, and Sales is about Implementation. What does that mean? The chart below will give you specifics about each one, but basically Networking is the relational aspect of your business. The connecting with others for the purpose of sharing resources, information, leads, referrals, ideas, etc. Cultivating a working network of relationships is crucial to your business development system, but in and of itself will not be the way you build or expand your client base. Marketing is how you will prepare yourself to take your unique identity package, your irresistible offer, and your message to market. This involves a lot of strategy, design work, writing, and outreach, but those things alone will not get you the clients you want. Sales activities are about implementing your business development strategies. Simply put, Sales involves making appointments, seeking to be of service, making fabulous and bold offers, and asking for the business. Your goal is to master the integration of where preparation and relation meet implementation.

Relation + Preparation + Implementation = CLIENTS

Or, stated another way,

Networking + Marketing + Sales = \$\$\$\$