

Selling In Tough Times

Issue 2 - 2010

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Business Networking Skills

The Evolve “How to” Guide



10 COMMANDMENTS OF GREAT NETWORKING

- ✓ It's not who you know, it's who knows and trusts you that counts.
- ✓ Networking is a planned ongoing part of a sales plan; it's not a once off event.
- ✓ Networking is for the mutual benefit of the all people involved – not just you!
- ✓ No connection is ever made without taking some form of risk. So take a risk!
- ✓ Networking is about building relationships and trust first – the business transactions happen later.
- ✓ Sincerity is the key. Show genuine and sincere interest in others and they will show sincere and genuine interest in you.
- ✓ Ask more questions: The more you know about the personal circumstances of others, the easier it is to follow up and help out.
- ✓ Find commonality, because it bonds people together and creates common purpose.
- ✓ Place a value on your networking time – plan it, practice it, and measure outcomes.
- ✓ The difference between where you want to be next year and where you are now is the people you network with.

HOW WELL NETWORKED ARE YOU?

In 2010 business development is tougher than ever before. Buyers are more cautious, preferring to spend their budgets with trusted suppliers. For this reason cold callers are finding phones slamming down faster than ever before. On top of this, the decision making process in many organisations' has moved up a level to more senior management, and this may mean your old contacts no longer have the power or autonomy to make purchasing decisions on their own any more. Clearly, to be successful in sales in 2010 it's not who you know that counts, it's who knows and trusts you that does.

The Sales Success Equation:

Your ability to have a successful sales year in 2010 will be determined by the following sales success equation.

The business contacts that know and trust me now

+ / - The additional business contacts who will know and trust me by 31st December 2010

= My sales success in 2010

This year, your ability to meet new sales prospects will be determined largely by the number of leads, referrals and introductions you get from your circle of influence. Your challenge is that trust and avoiding unnecessary risks are the two main purchasing criteria all buyers are using in these troubled times. This means they definitely won't buy from you if they don't know and trust you. The good news is that potential customers may agree to meet you because someone in your circle of influence is a trusted colleague of theirs. If you want sales success in 2010 – then it's time increase your circle of influence, and that means getting serious and strategic about business networking.

MYTHS ABOUT NETWORKING

“Networking is manipulative”

This is a myth. Great networkers understand the key to building sustainable business contacts is building trust. Trust is built on cooperation, honesty, sincerity and reciprocity. Manipulation is not about any of these traits.

“Networking is a waste of time”

Well if that's what you believe then that's what networking will be for you! We find most of the people who say this don't understand the ten commandments of networking and aren't prepared to consider taking time out to learn any of them. Networking requires planning, practice, a process, and lots of perseverance. When you show up, talk about yourself and ask for business you waste everybody's time.

“Networking is for socialites – I find it difficult talking to strangers”

Lots of people are shy. However, networking is not just about meeting people at formal events, it can be about meeting people in your local sports club or via “Linked In”. Use the method that you are most comfortable with.



STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD – QUESTIONS YOU NEED TO ASK AT A NETWORKING EVENT

Going to networking events is tough. It's often really awkward to walk into an association meeting, trade show or after-hours event when you don't know a soul who is there. Everyone else seems to be engaged in discussions with long-lost friends and there you stand, desperately looking around for even one friendly face. And, then when you eventually meet someone, your conversation is awkward or worse again you just talk about yourself! Here are some questions to help you break the ice and get into decent conversations:

- What brings you here today?
- Where else do you network?
- How did you get your start in the “ABC” business?
- What changes are happening, or can you predict happening, within your industry?
- What does your ideal customer look like?
- What separates you and your company from the competition?
- What can I do to help you today?
- Who else do you know here today?
- What is the best way to refer someone to you? Do you have a specific process?

People will usually reciprocate and ask you a few questions about your business, but remember you are there to connect with them, so make them feel important. Since you want to meet the all the people you identified before the event, keep conversations to a maximum of ten minutes and then move on.

NETWORKING: WHAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU?

There is a multitude of networking opportunities available out there for you to choose from. So before, you head off like a bat out of hell to attend all and sundry, it's important to make sure the people you want to connect with be at the events you are going to attend. This means you need a clear networking plan, outlining who you want to meet and where they tend to congregate etc. Let's start your planning process by completing the following questioning exercise?

a) Who

- Who do I want to network with? Why?
- What industry might they be in?
- What sized organisation?
- What level will they be working at within their company?
- What parts of the country are they located?

b) Where

- Where are they most likely to network?
- What type of events do they attend or network at?
- Where do these events take place?
- What is the regularity of these events?
- How do I attend one of these events?

c) My Networking To Date (Self analysis)

- Who am I connected with already?
- What have these connections meant for me?
- Where do I network?
- Do the people I need to meet attend my networking events?
- Apart from sales, how do I measure success in my networking efforts?
- How much planning do I put into my networking?
- Am I known and trusted by sufficient people currently, to exceed my sales target for 2010?
- Do I need to have a more structured networking plan for this year?

Who are Evolve Consultants?

Founded in 1998, Evolve Consultants are Ireland's leading sales performance authority. We specialise in helping organisations' adapt the right sales framework for their business strategy. We offer a blended approach of consulting, training and coaching to help them get there.

- **Sales strategy**
- **Sales deployment models**
- **Sales process and execution**
- **Sales training and coaching**
- **Account management**
- **Sales manager mentoring**

Our approach to improving sales performance integrates every aspect of your organization's sales efforts. Our methods are practical and bespoke. Fundamentally, we believe we can help clarify your issues, focus your sales activities and most importantly help you significantly increase your sales numbers.

IT'S ALL ABOUT GOOD FOLLOW UP

It's the follow up *after* the event that can really pay dividends for you.

When you attend a networking event, whether a conference, seminar or business-club meeting, your work has only started. It's the follow up after the event that moves the relationship on, establishes trust and eventually will enable business happen.

Follow up includes trading information that is valuable to each other via e-mail and gaining other introductions from your new connection and vice versa. However, far too many people walk away from networking events feeling good about the event and the number of business cards collected or given out, but doing nothing to move names on business cards into potential business associates. Here are some ideas to make your networking following up.

Consider introducing someone to your new contact.

This is a straight forward process. All you have to do is introduce a new contact from a networking event to someone else you in your sphere of influence who you feel they should know. Where these two people take the relationship is up is immaterial, but you will be remembered as the person who made the introduction. You should try to this after every networking event.

Within twenty four hours, send an e-mail / hand written note.

Don't wait until you have something meaningful to say or don't wait until next week for fear of looking to keen! Chances are you won't get around to sending a note if you wait around, and even if you do, the recipient may not recall who you are. Send an e-mail to everyone you took a card from. Better again; send them a hand written note. Remember, even if you don't see them as an immediate connection, just say nice to meet with you.

Make notes on your experiences.

Whenever you return from an event, take about ten minutes to write down some notes about it. Bullet-point ideas, or write them across your whiteboard. Just get the ideas down!

Thank the host, if applicable.

This especially applies to events that are put together by one individual. A quick note thanking that person for their efforts will go a long way.

Phone them and meet up.

Pick up the phone after a couple of weeks and continue the conversation you started to explore at the networking event.

And, remember to stay in touch.

NETWORKING VIA THE WEB

It's almost impossible to talk about best practice networking skills without bringing "virtual networking" or networking via the Internet into the conversation. Because of the role email plays in business and with the ever increasing popularity of online business networking communities such as "Linked In" the professional seller would be remiss not to leverage this media.

We find many people place their personal profiles on these websites and wait for business contacts to contact them by the score. This rarely happens. Virtual networking is no different to face

to face networking – as with everything in life you only get out of it what you put into it. So given that "Linked In" is the most popular virtual networking site – here are some ideas to make the most of that resource;

- Fill out your profile completely to earn trust.
- Don't turn off your contacts:
- Avoid hard-sell tactics.
- Write honest and valuable recommendations for your contacts.
- Request LinkedIn recommendation from happy customers willing to provide testimonials.
- Grow your network by joining industry and alumni groups related to your business.
- Share survey and poll results with your contacts.
- Publish your LinkedIn URL on your marketing material.
- Use the advanced search feature to find people (targets) by company, industry and city.
- Start and manage a group for your industry.
- Research your prospects before meetings
- Share useful articles and resources that will be of interest to customers and prospects.
- Post your presentations on your profile using PowerPoint.
- Ask your first-level contacts for introductions to their first-level contacts.
- Set up to receive LinkedIn messages in your Outlook inbox so you can respond right away.
- Update everything regularly

By the way my Linked In URL address is



20 SAVY NETWORKING TIPS

1. Try and **get a list of the attendees** for the networking event in the days prior to the event taking place. This will enable you identify who you want to meet.
2. **Try and arrange some introductions via the event host / organiser** in advance of the event. More than likely they will already know the people you want to meet.
3. Arrive early and stay late. **If the networking is taking place around a speech or formal event all the networking takes place before and after the event. Don't miss the action.**
4. **If you don't know anyone at the event, stick close to the event organiser / association officers** – a lot of attendees will want to talk with them and you can meet new people in their company.
5. **Avoid people you already know.** You should initially acknowledge people you know already, and then immediately find someone new to introduce yourself to. This will help keep you in the right frame of mind as to why you went to the event.
6. **Always have business cards and keep them in a place where they are easy to access**
7. **Stop selling and start connecting.** When you meet someone for the first time, use it as an opportunity to get to know them. Don't try to sell them anything.
8. **Prepare four or five questions** that you can ask people that you meet. Make sure the questions are not overly intrusive
9. **When giving or receiving a business card, be especially careful when dealing with people from outside the Ireland** as many cultures treat business cards with very high regard.
10. **When receiving a business card from someone, take a moment to write yourself a note on it such as where you met.** If you do this while you're still talking to the person, it will help convey your sense of personal connection.
11. When in groups act as the host, **introduce each new person who joins the group to the others in your company.**
12. **During the course of a conversation, use the other person's first name two or three times.** People always like to hear their own name and it will help you to remember it when the discussion is over.
13. Know how you can help them. **People don't care what you do, unless what you can do can help them.** Get to know which of their problems, issues and challenges you can help with.
14. Tell people you will be following up with them while you are still talking with them. Tell them what you will be sending and how you will send it to them. Then they will be watching out for it.
15. When you meet someone for the first time, **you have 24 hours to follow up** with them before they will completely forget about meeting you.
16. Back at the office, **use the back of their business card to jot a note** about something you learned from the conversation and the date and place
17. **Send a handwritten note** to your new contacts acknowledging the fact that you met.
18. Connect with your new contact via **Linked In** within a week of meeting with them.
19. **Keep in touch**, especially when you no longer have a specific requirement to fulfil.
20. Review the usefulness of the networking events you attend on a regular basis.

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