

LET'S TALK NETWORKING

BUILD LONG-LASTING BUSINESS CONNECTIONS



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Networking is an essential skill for success in the business world.

Building meaningful connections and cultivating a strong network can open doors to new opportunities, partnerships, and collaborations.

In this book, we will explore the power of networking and provide valuable strategies to help you build and leverage your professional connections effectively.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For over 25 years, Ginni Barnhart has been right in the middle of the real estate, mortgage, and small business development arenas, where networking was at the forefront of her professional growth.

As a small business owner, Ginni is truly passionate about connecting with people. Growing her network through connections is a strong priority in building lasting business relationships. The result of this is that 100% of her business are referrals from satisfied clients and the most experienced professionals who work and live in the Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky Metropolitan areas.

Ginni's mission is continued network growth where she can utilize her extensive experience in helping others achieve their goals through effective networking.

While not working, Ginni enjoys spending time with her family, travel, community outreach programs, and of course, networking.



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CHAPTER 1

Define Your Networking Goals

Before diving into networking activities, it's essential to define your networking goals. Determine what you hope to achieve through networking, whether it's expanding your client base, finding mentors or advisors, seeking career opportunities, or gaining industry insights.

Clearly defining your goals will guide your networking efforts and help you identify the right people and events to engage with.

How to Make Net “Work”

Many individuals are confused about networking, and therefore doubt its effectiveness. Networking is the art of building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships. So, like anything else, networking requires a bit of practice and finesse, but if done correctly, networking can be an invaluable part of your personal development and business growth.

Here are a few tips that can help develop a network that works for you:

Be Patient

Networking doesn't happen overnight; it's a process. Networking is not just something you can check off your weekly to do list like “Network & Get a Referral”

While people may want to help you, they might not be able to do so right away. Quite simply, you may not be the first item on their agenda. So, if someone agrees to meet with you but can't do so immediately, accept their offer graciously and patiently. Never let an opportunity to meet with someone during the course of networking slip away. Always be open to meeting!

Be Authentic and Kind

When you do meet with someone resulting from your scheduling attempts, take a sincere interest in their life, not just the information or possible assistance they can offer you. Don't push people for their knowledge or connections and then abandon the relationship. Networking means fostering relationships. This objective cannot be achieved by one person constantly taking while the other person constantly gives information or time. Relationships are built on trust and sharing over time.

Be considerate and respectful to all you meet. Find ways to periodically reconnect with the contacts in your network to stay up to date on their lives, and let them know that you genuinely care about what is going on with them. Also, connecting and re-connecting, take the time to let them know that their advice and counsel was heard and put to good use. Acknowledging their individual value to you and to your career. Reinforcement of the time and advice offered by those in your network will foster gratefulness, awareness of their value to you and encourage them to continue helping you and others.

Be a Conduit

Remember, the objective of networking is, well, more networking. You should be constantly adding people to your list of contacts. Always find more contacts to meet and, in turn, become a great connector yourself! Open up your network to others. Hopefully, they'll follow suit and do the same for you, keeping the cycle going. Think about those contacts who could help others in your network, then introduce them!

Be a Teacher

Keep in mind that not everyone you meet will understand what networking is or how they can help you. Many people think that the best way they can help you is to simply give your name to people they come in contact with who may need your service or product. While their intentions are noble, their strategy won't help you and could actually wind up being counter-productive and consequently, losing you a great connection.

Learn more about the company, share information about yourself, and begin to build a relationship rather than ending up as just another contact lost at the bottom of the pile.

Be a Helper

Networking is all about reciprocity. No matter who you're dealing with, you should always try to give more than you receive. For example, if you have information about a particular company, industry, or educational program that would be valuable to someone in your network, share it. By sharing you will help others and in turn, others will help you.

Whether you're currently self-employed or a salesperson for a company is irrelevant - networking is a constant process. Obviously, you'll be more on the receiving end of your contacts' information when you're on the lookout for creating new business partners. But that just means you need to work that much harder at giving information and sharing your network while growing your sphere.

If you're constantly looking for ways to help people in your network achieve their goals, they'll be much more likely to help you in return.

CHAPTER 2

How Well Do You Know Them

It is often said that it is not who you know that matters, it is who knows you. Well, I would like to extend this statement by saying that it is not only who you know and who knows you, but how well do you know them and they you?

In business, networking is the ultimate form of promotion. It can help you to obtain new clients, a new job, or even help you to move up the corporate ladder. It is the process of building relationships. Any time that you attend a meeting, trade show, or a social function, you are networking whether you realize it or not. It is the relationship that you have with people, a prospect or a client that makes the difference between success and failure.



Often, we fail to realize the reasons that we have for doing business with an individual or a company. In the case of products that we regularly buy, what helps us to make the buying decision? There are those that will buy a specific brand of product because they trust that brand to be of a high quality or durability. There are others that will make a buying decision based on price, although this is less frequently the case. Often, we simply do business because we feel good about it. In fact, most purchases or decisions to do business are based on two things. Trust and comfort. Trust is a very intangible emotion or feeling. How do you measure it? How do you develop it?

Trust is measured by the feelings that are generated by a process of letting someone get to know more about you than just product, features and price. I know a gentleman who provides a seminar on selling to C-level executives. He says that to sell to the C-level executive, you have to be more than a salesperson selling a product or service. To sell to the executive level, you have to be more of an advisor. You have to find needs other than the ones that you can fulfill and help them to fulfill these needs. In doing this, you become a "trusted advisor." They feel "comfortable" that you have their interests in mind more than just making a quick sale and a commission.

In our daily process of seeking prospective clients, do we often just look for a person to pitch, or do we spend a bit more time getting to know them before we try to sell?

When we take the time to know a person's desires, dreams, and needs, and make an honest effort to help them realize that these things are important to us, we are really on the fast track to doing business with them. We are building the trust, confidence, comfort level, and most importantly the relationship that is needed to not only make the sale, but to create in them a resource for endless referrals.

As we go into the community meeting people who are prospective clients, we should keep the following in mind. The customer is a person just like me. The customer has needs other than the one that I can fulfill. Until I understand what the ultimate goal or dream of the prospect is, I cannot fulfill it with my product or service.

Selling and networking are about relationships. You sell in everything that you do whether you realize it or not. The time is now for more effective selling. Change the way you think about the prospect and the prospect will change the way that they think about you.

CHAPTER 3

Attend Networking Events

Networking events provide valuable opportunities to connect with like-minded professionals in your industry or target market. Research and attend relevant conferences, industry meetups, seminars, and business networking events. Prepare ahead of time by researching the attendees, speakers, and topics of interest.

When attending network events, approach conversations with a genuine interest in others. Be an active listener, ask meaningful questions, and engage in authentic conversations. Remember to bring business cards and exchange contact information with individuals you connect with.

Use Your Time Wisely

Networking events provide an effective way to meet and connect with potential clients. What you need to do when you attend these networking events, though, is quickly determine if the person you are talking to is a “sweet spot” client.

- *Is this person part of your small business target market?*
- *Is he or she a decision maker or influencer?*
- *Does this business have the potential to become a regular, long-term client or referral source?*

To get these answers you need to work the room at a networking event efficiently and productively.

“Working” A Networking Event

At networking events, you want to talk to people that own or manage a small business. These are the people who have potential to become your ‘sweet spot’ clients. At the very least, the people you talk to at these networking events should work in, or for, a small business

When you connect with a person who fits the small business criteria, ask some subtle questions to determine if he or she meets the sweet-spot profile. Spend some time thinking about who you want to connect with and create some questions where the answers will determine whether or not to dig deeper with the individual providing the answers.

The answers to these questions will help you lead the discussion and give you a lot of great insight as to where to go next.

The Bottom Line on Networking Events

Networking events offer a short window to connect with as many potential clients as possible. You want to use your time at these networking events wisely. By asking direct and specific questions you can quickly determine the sweet-spot potential of the people attending the networking event. If there is potential, then follow-up questions to determine if the person you are talking to is a decision maker or influencer are in order. If not, then you can be confident in your decision to say goodbye and move on.

Networking is More than Handing Out Business Cards

At an AmSpirit Area Wide Network event several years ago, a well-dress woman walked up to me, business card in hand and, in perfect form held it in both hands in front of me, gesturing for me to take it. I took the card from her and smiled. She looked up and in a polite voice, said “Thank you,” and walked away. How sad. Here was this obviously well-intentioned woman, who most likely owned an interesting business, but never learned what to do when exchanging business cards. Somewhere, she bought into the idea that you were suppose to hand out as many business cards in as little time as possible. Clearly, this does nothing but waste business cards. Great for card businesses, not so great for yours.

The other extreme is the person who spends the entire time at a network event talking to the same individual, sometimes even people from their own company. Again, this is quite unproductive. The purpose of attending a network event is to get to meet new people in a pleasant atmosphere.

While there are many good books to help you hone your networking skills including, Sue Roaneís *'How to Work a Room'*, the essence of networking is quite simple.

Businesses run on relationships. In fact, everything that we do is about personal relationships and a business just gives us a playing field on which to do it.

Following that theme, growing your business is about developing and nurturing relationships and similar networking events are really the starting point to begin what will hopefully become a mutually rewarding relationship.

Since your time is limited, it is a good idea to spend only a short time speaking with people, especially those you already know. If you feel a resonance with someone you're talking with, make arrangements to follow-up your connection at a later date and move on to meet someone else. I'm sure the shy looking person in the corner, who is probably there for the very first time, has something interesting to say. Why not



go over and extend your hand.

The other big faux pas I see over and over again, are the people who approach the networking meeting with a “me, me, me” attitude. A better approach is to learn about the other person first. You then have the option of explaining how what you do might be of interest to them. This establishes a stronger platform for communications, for as speaking legend Zig Zigler says, *“You get what you want by helping other people get what they want.”*

Care About the Other Person

There are better ways to network and meet prospective business contacts. For openers, (no pun intended) people are more responsive if you first show some interest in them and what they do. There is an old cliché that says we have one mouth and two ears for a reason. If you listen more than you talk, you will automatically find people more interested in talking with you and being around you.

Marketing guru, Jay Abraham, once said that *“Discovery is the fuel of competitive advantage.”* Get curious. Become interested in other people and what makes them tick. Really care about the other person. If you take the time to investigate, you will find that even those people who appear quite ordinary have a story to tell. If you show an interest in them and their lives, you will not only increase your chances of doing business with them but you may gain a friend as well.

How do you do that?

When you do introduce yourself, do so in a way that states the benefit of doing business with you. Saying *“Hi, my name is Mary and I sell insurance”* is not very exciting. However, if you were to say, *“My name is Mary and I help people prepare for the uncertainty that may be in their future.”* This causes the other person, if they are at all curious, to ask, *“How do you do that?”* At this point, you have opened the door for a further explanation or “commercial” for your business. You can go on to explain the benefits of your products and services.

As an exercise, devise three or four ways to introduce your business. Let each one focus on a different benefit of your product or service. Test each of them at your next networking event.

Remember: people do not buy products or services, they buy benefits and solutions.

The more you focus on communicating the benefits gained from using your products or services, the more you will benefit from the increase in business.

With prospecting new business becoming more and more difficult, a personal

relationship is even more important and a Tri-Co Network event offers the perfect playground for you to do it, besides the food is usually pretty good too.

The Art of Handing Out Business Cards

Giving business cards is an art, not only because they are needed to be considered successful or because, in fact, they represent your corporate or professional identity, but also as an opportunity to impact your existing or prospective customers, and stay in touch with them, helping you to deal confidently.

The scope of business etiquette includes considerations that many professionals ignore, or simply do not pay enough attention in the belief that a business card is just a small paper rectangle with a name and phone numbers to introduce yourself.

Color business cards demonstrate that there is something else beyond a simple paper cut; otherwise, they simply would not exist. Certainly, all over the world business cards are used to provide information about a company and/or the employee or professional who holds it, as well as contact information and other details such as business acquaintances or personal details.

Some of them include expressly empty spaces to write certain details such as an appointment date, some others are as simple as blank cards that come in handy when the holder has to leave a customer further details. However, those in color are undoubtedly part of a practical business strategy following refined business etiquette.

In business, time is gold and every minute is important because more often an individual only has a few minutes to impress a prospective client, before someone else does it first. Gentle manners can conquer, but accompanied with poor business cards, it is more likely the client will forget about you as soon as you leave. Unprofessional business cards will not impress but will leave your prospective client with negative thoughts about your company.

On the other hand, color business cards are as attractive that catch the eye of even the most skeptical business contact. There is nothing more accurate than "a picture is worth a thousand words" when it comes to describing the first impression left on a person who receives a business card especially crafted to achieve a predefined business goal.

Color business cards and regular business cards should meet the criteria of being printed in very high quality paper, designed by professionals and never using public domain graphics or other elements that makes them look cheap. Make sure to include all personal information to your business acquaintances, and always carry enough of them with you, particularly when you are planning to attend a business meeting or social event.

The art of business cards is not only in giving them away, but also exchanging and receiving. Every time you attend an event where other professionals participate, try to exchange business cards with them, particularly color business cards to better

impress, and when you receive a business card, study its design and content because you can learn from them.

Finally, always keep in mind that business cards are the branding tool of your company, not just a piece of paper to stay in touch with someone else.

Utilize Online Networking Platforms

In today's digital age, online networking platforms have become powerful tools for expanding your professional network. Utilize platforms such as LinkedIn, Alignable, industry-specific forums, and online communities to connect with professionals from around the world.

Optimize your online profiles to showcase your expertise, experience, and interests. Actively engage in conversations, share valuable content, and provide insights within your industry. Join relevant groups and participate in discussions to expand your visibility and connect with like-minded professionals.



When reaching out to individuals online, personalize your messages to demonstrate a genuine interest in connecting. Offer value by sharing relevant resources, insights, and/or introductions. Nurture online connections by regularly engaging with their content, offering support, and maintaining a presence in their professional network.

It's important to keep in mind, that while utilizing online network platforms is an essential piece of networking... it's only a piece, a small piece at that. Nothing replaces physically attending local networking events.

CHAPTER 4

Know & Overcome the Stumbling Blocks

The ability to connect with people is essential to success in any business. Professional networking events present opportunities to interact with others on a personal level and to develop profitable relationships. These occasions are critical for anyone who wants to grow a business or promote a career.

Many people are simply not comfortable walking into a room full of strangers and striking up conversations. Rather than be a part of the action, we are, in fact, more comfortable as a wallflower and watching the activity around us.

Here are five common stumbling blocks that you may face and tips to help you overcome them.



A RELUCTANCE TO TALK TO STRANGERS. You were taught at an early age not to speak to people you don't know. It's not safe. In certain situations today this is still good advice. In business, however, talking to strangers is a way to generate interest and support for your business. If you only talk to the people you already know, you will miss out on opportunities to make new connections and establish valuable contacts.

To get past your discomfort in talking to strangers, set a goal for yourself before you attend any networking event. Decide how many new contacts you want to make or how many strangers you want to meet. In some cases, you may specifically target individuals whom you'd like to know.

Next come up with some icebreakers or conversation starters. Have questions prepared that you can ask anyone you meet at the event. You may want to inquire about other people's business, their connection to the sponsoring organization or their opinion of the venue.

LACK OF A FORMAL INTRODUCTION. It's much easier to make a new contact when there is someone else to handle the introduction and pave the way. If you wait for another person to make the move you may not meet anyone. At networking events, the goal is to meet as many people as possible.

This is the time to take the bull by the horns, walk up to people you don't

know, introduce yourself and start a conversation. You can do this if you have prepared your self-introduction in advance.

You will not introduce yourself the same way on every occasion. Perhaps it is your first time to attend an association meeting. In that case, you might want to say that as part of your introduction. Let people know who you are, why you are there and give them a reason to ask more about you.

FEAR OF BEING SEEN AS PUSHY. You may think that you will turn people off if you are assertive and that if they want to talk to you, they will make the first move. If this is your line of thinking you will find yourself spending your time alone at the reception or meeting function and leaving without a single new connection. Being open, friendly and interested does not turn people off.

You will not come across as overly aggressive if you seek out the “approachable” people. These are the ones who are standing alone or who are speaking in groups of three or more. Two people talking to each other are not approachable because they may be having a private conversation and you would be interrupting.

THINKING THAT OTHER PEOPLE MAY NOT LIKE YOU. There is always the risk that the other person is not interested in you and doesn’t want to meet or talk to you. It happens. If that is the case, don’t take it personally. Nothing ventured is nothing gained. When you get a cold shoulder, smile, move on and say to yourself, “Next?”

HAVING YOUR INTENTIONS MISUNDERSTOOD. Approaching someone of the opposite sex to begin a conversation may seem more like flirting than networking. This is more of an issue for women than men. Women have an equal place in the work arena and need to make professional connections the same as men do. Women in business can no longer afford to hold back when there is opportunity at hand.

Neither men nor women will have their motives misinterpreted if they present themselves professionally in their attire and if they keep the conversation focused on business issues or topics that are not personal or private.

Whatever your stumbling blocks, face them before the next networking event and devise a personal plan for getting past them. Once you do, you will find yourself connecting with confidence and courtesy on every occasion and the results will be reflected in your bottom line.

Build Relationships through Follow-up

Building meaningful connections requires consistent effort and follow-up. After attending networking events or connecting online, follow up with individuals you’ve

met to solidify the relationship. Send personalized follow-up emails or messages, referencing specific points of discussion or shared interests. Better yet, send a card or personal note through the mail. Mail is still a great way to make an impression, especially in a world of electronic delivery methods.

Maintain regular contact with your network by sharing updates, articles, or resources that may be of interest to them. Consider scheduling coffee or virtual meetings to deepen the connection and explore potential collaborations or partnerships.

Keep in mind that networking is not solely about what others can do for you, but also about how you can provide support and value to them. A great philosophy is to give first, then receive. Be a good resource by planting seeds into other's professional gardens, put their needs before your own, and you will reap many benefits and reach your goals more abundantly.

CHAPTER 5

Seek Out Mentorship Opportunities

Mentorship is a valuable aspect of networking that can provide guidance, support, and invaluable insights. Seek out mentors who have achieved success in your field or possess expertise that you admire. Attend industry events, join mentorship programs, or reach out to individuals who inspire you on either a personal level or in their professional attributes.

When approaching potential mentors, be respectful of their time and demonstrate your commitment to learning from them. Clearly articulate your goals and how their mentorship can contribute to your growth.

Maintain open lines of communication, schedule regular check-ins, and be receptive to their guidance and feedback.

Be sure to take notes on what makes the most impact in their mentorship style and learn how to become a mentor yourself, so that you are in a position to pay it forward to someone who may seek you out to be their mentor.



Give Back and Pay It Forward

Networking is always a two-way street. To build lasting and meaningful connections, it's important to give back to your network and pay it forward. Offer support, advice, or introductions to individuals in your network when you can. Actively listen to their needs and challenges and offer assistance or resources that may be valuable to them. By providing value and support to others, you strengthen your relationships and create a positive reputation within your network.

Additionally, consider sharing your knowledge and expertise through speaking engagements, workshops, or mentoring opportunities. Being generous with your time and knowledge not only benefits others but also positions you as a trusted and respected professional in your field.

Embrace Authenticity and Building Genuine Connections

Authenticity is the key to building genuine and meaningful connections through networking. Be yourself and let your true personality shine. People are more likely to

connect with someone who is authentic and relatable.

Focus on building relationships, rather than simply collecting contacts. Take the time to get to know individuals on a deeper level, understand their goals and aspirations, and find common ground. Show genuine interest and empathy for others, and be a source of support and encouragement.

Remember that networking is a long-term endeavor. It requires patience, consistency, and a genuine commitment to nurturing relationships over time. Don't solely focus on immediate gains or self-interest. Instead, invest in building mutually beneficial connections that can withstand the test of time.

CHAPTER 6

Work Your Network

If you're networking with strangers, you're wasting your time. A consultant friend of mine recently complained, I'm doing 2-3 networking events a week and I'm worn out. When I asked why she felt networking was important, she replied, One of my marketing goals is to do at least 1 networking event a week. (I pointed out that she just admitted to doing 2-3 a week and perhaps doing 1 a week is smart and doing triple that goal is causing some of the fatigue.)

But there's much more to the great American business myth of networking.

Myth 1: The more you network, the more effective your networking activities become.

Truth 1: It's much more important to become well-known in 1-2 circles than to spread your networking activities over many different groups. Depth beats breadth every time.



I then asked her how networking was working for her. She said, I don't think I have gotten a shred of business out of it in the last six months. Her rationale for doing networking: Everybody knows that you build a business by networking! Does this make any sense? Or worse, does it sound familiar?

See if this networking scenario has happened to you:

You meet someone for 30 seconds. They mumble something about real estate as you are tuning them out. They ask you what you do, and you say you are in insurance. After 10 seconds of staring blankly at each other, you both head to the celery sticks for lack of anything better to do.

Myth 2: The cocktails and miniature wiener circuit is the way to network to success

Truth 2: Networking with strangers to build business is about as effective as going to a bar to get married. In the words of Dr. Phil, It simply ain't gonna happen that way.

Here's why you're not going to meet your business soul mate at a networking event:

1. You aren't going to do business with someone after meeting them for a few minutes and getting handed a poorly printed card.
2. Businesses are built on relationships and not 30-second commercials, no matter how effective and intriguing.
3. Most of us have major trouble in explaining what we do, much less getting past that explanation and listening for what prospects need.
4. Networking with strangers is not targeted or specific and in fact is completely random. For some people, networking is exactly as effective as cold calling, which is the least effective marketing tool there is.

So am I saying that networking is a waste of time? Absolutely not. What I'm saying is you need to start networking smarter.

Here are a few thoughts to jog your noggin:

- Network by having coffee or lunch with people one on one. Get to know them and their business. They may become a prospect, alliance partner, or referral source. But aim first and foremost to make them a friend. The rest will follow naturally.
- If you're going to network with strangers, go with the goal of making 2-3 lunch or coffee dates with people you find interesting.
- Ask every happy customer you have (they're all happy, right?) for just one referral of someone who would be interested in your type of goods or services, then call and use their name. (Hi I'm Fred and Ginger said I should call you. Isn't Ginger great?) You already have one thing in common with Ginger!
- Create a network hit list of the exact kind of businesses you want to network with and maybe you sell software and you want to meet IT managers at medium-size companies. Make the list and put it in your little black book or PDA. Focus your networking and outreach activities on only those people ñ or others who can refer you to those people.
- Join non-business groups and spend time doing non-business activities: Civic, social, religious, recreational, musical, athletic... the list is endless. Establish relationships with people in your group. Perhaps you're a Moose and a realtor. A Moose, as it turns out, wants to buy a house from another Moose. If so, you have the Moose Market cornered! Are you into hand-drumming. Guess what? A hand-drummer will want to do business with another hand-drummer. Get it?
- If you do go to a mixer, go with a targeted goal in mind. For example, your goal might be to meet three people on my target list and get their card so I can follow up for breakfast, lunch, coffee or badminton. A traditional networking event now becomes simply the first phase of your targeted plan for global domination, and not an end in itself.

- Bring a guest with you. Sometimes, going to events for the first time with another first-timer helps provide the confidence needed to approach people you don't know.

Here's a final thought to shake up your networking mindset: Network with people who already know you, like you, or have done business with you.

Myth 3: Networking is all about getting more people to know what you do.

Truth 3: Networking is all about getting people that already know you to share opportunities where you can be helpful to each other.

Make 2-3 phone calls a day to connect with people from past jobs, former clients, or influential people who have expressed interest in you in the past.

We all have a fan base that we grossly underutilize.

Think about tapping into friends, colleagues, mentors, and family to mine the connections you already have at your fingertips.

So get out there and network, but make it worth your investment of time and energy by networking smart. As your mother always said, Don't network with strangers.

CHAPTER 7

Join Networking Groups

Join local networking groups. These groups are designed to strengthen business connection relationships that will deepen and strengthen your network. There are different types of groups that help make the connections needed to broaden your sphere of influence. Some groups meet monthly in a more social environment, while others meet weekly to really dive into creating long-lasting partnerships.

Depending on your budget, you may want to start out with a monthly group. When you have a better grip on networking in a social setting, then visit a weekly group.

If you're not yet sure where to begin, these groups give an opportunity to visit as a guest prior to joining, so that you can check it out before making a monetary commitment.



Why should you pay to join? It's important that every member is invested, in other words, have skin in the game. Without this important element, it would be easy to quit before you get started and lose the opportunity of a lifetime.

Tri-Co Network / Monthly

AmSpirit / Weekly

Strategies for Successful Business Networking

There are a variety of organizations that run networking groups across the country. The largest group is probably BNI, followed by AmSpirit Business Connections, which offers members the chance to attend weekly meetings and develop new professional relationships to help them grow their business. Some organizations, like Tri-Co Network are now organizing "leads groups" to meet monthly for their members as well. These groups are intended to offer members a way to connect with each other and potentially refer each other business.

In most "leads groups" each group allows no more than one representative from any industry, so if the group has a mortgage broker other mortgage brokers have to join another group or wait for the seat to open up. The idea is that by restricting membership, you eliminate competition within the group.

The agenda at most structured networking meetings is pretty straightforward. Each member is given an opportunity to introduce themselves, then there is a short presentation by one or two members (each member gets the chance eventually). The meeting ends with members discussing potential referrals for each other. This means that most of the members get about one minute to present who they are and teach the other members of the group how to refer to them.

Most people do a great job of presenting themselves. However, most people do not think to ask for referrals. At most networking events, you are not expected to ask for a referral or explain what a good referral for you is. However, at a leads group it is not only acceptable, it is expected!

I am involved in a number of networking groups and have used the simple outline below to create my elevator pitch (quick introduction). When I deliver my elevator pitch to a leads group, my goal is to educate everyone in the room about my company and what I do, as well as to teach them the best way to refer others to me. In addition, I want to make sure I actually ask for a specific referral. I will go through each piece of the outline in detail, but here are the basics.

- *Introduction*
- *Name*
- *Position + company name*
- *Location of the company*
- *Overview of services*
- *Tell a story*
- *Call to action*

The introduction piece of your presentation should stay the same every time you give it. You might say something like, "My name is Joe Smith. I am mortgage broker at ABC mortgages in Anytown, USA. We offer a full line of residential and commercial mortgage products." You can add some additional detail, but you should really focus on keeping this short and on point.

At each meeting, you will have the chance to differentiate yourself from the competition by telling a short story during your presentation. The story can be related to a specific challenge you helped a client overcome, a unique feature of your product or service, or you can simply talk about a new development at your company. Consider writing out your stories in advance so you know what you are going to say at each meeting. In addition, you can schedule the content so that the other members of your group learn more and more about you at each meeting. You need to focus on educating your group a little more each week.

The "call to action" is very important and the piece that most people overlook. You need to tell the other members of your group exactly what type of referral you are looking for. For example, our mortgage broker, Joe Smith, might say, "Today a good referral for me would be a Realtor at XYZ real estate company." Joe may also say, "Today a good referral for me would be anyone who purchased their home more than 10 years ago."

I always recommend that your “call to action” is as specific as possible. If Joe stands up and says that a good referral would be anyone who needs a mortgage, the rest of the group will have a harder time thinking of people to refer. If Joe asks for an introduction to a specific person at a specific company, someone in the group may know that person or know someone at that company who can facilitate Joe’s introduction. The more specific the request, the more likely it is to trigger someone else in the group’s memory.

A last minute hint:

Keep focused on the networks of the people in the group, not on the people themselves. In other words, when you are participating in a networking or leads group, you should not focus on gaining the business of the people at the table. Instead, you should focus on gaining their trust so that they will refer you people in their network.

Be a Leader

If you have the skill to connect and grow your own group using platforms like Tri-Co Network and AmSpirit, get started now. These groups are always willing to help individuals start, grow, and maintain their own networking groups.

Being a leader is not for the faint of heart. You need to be ready to commit for the long haul. Create realistic short-term and long-term goals. Make sure your short-term goals feed into your long-term goals. Meet regularly with your directors and be focused on the growth of your network.

Be ready for the ups and downs of building a network. Failures always lead to success. So be okay with a failure here and there and know that you are on your way to success.

CONCLUSION

Networking is a powerful tool for professional growth and success. By strategically attending networking events, leveraging online platforms, building relationships through follow-up, seeking mentorship opportunities, and embracing authenticity, you can cultivate a strong and meaningful professional network.

Networking is not just about what others can do for you, but also about how you can provide support, value, and opportunities to others. It is through genuine connections and a willingness to give back that long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationships are formed.

Remember that networking is an ongoing process. Continuously seek out opportunities to expand your network, nurture existing relationships, and embrace new connections. With the power of networking, you can open doors to new opportunities, collaborations, and personal growth, propelling your professional success to new heights.

NOTES

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, leaving small margins at the top and bottom. There are no vertical margin lines, text, or other markings on the page.

