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People Networking

Jumping from ‘who’ to ‘how’ is crucial in networking

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David is a very likable guy with a big heart and a great smile, but he’s clueless about networking. He has mastered the gusto of the “who” but not the grit of the “how.”

The “how” is precisely what trips up many a well-intentioned networker like David. When he sights a person he wants to meet, the small but critical details get overlooked about how to establish the connection properly and build the relationship.

Here are some frequent “how” mistakes:

- Too soon – David tries to close the deal in the first encounter. A big mistake — this is not sales.
- Too much information: David overshares. He gets into great detail about why he should be hired. His follow-up e-mail after a first meeting is about two pages long and includes attachments.
- Lack of customization: His introductory and follow-up e-mails have a mix of fonts, so it is clear they are templates. Other than changing the first line or so, there is nothing he puts in that is genuinely focused on what he can do for me.
- Quantity vs. quality: David thinks that if he sends out an e-mail to every person he meets he is bound to hit the bull’s eye. With networking, less is often more. A database is everyone you meet; your network is more targeted.
- Wrong person: David recently met me, yet he tries to persuade me to share my prized Rolodex, which I’ve been building for years. He should instead be investing his time in getting others who know him, like him and trust him to tap into their networks on his behalf. That’s making contacts for him rather than turning over contact information.
- Unrealistic expectations: Who isn’t going to solve his problem anyway. It is the how that gets you from one person to another.

- No free rides: We have all heard “there’s no such thing as a free lunch.” Networking is not free. If people give you their time, ideas and maybe even a contact or two, that is hugely valuable and should be respected. Pick up the coffee or lunch tab. All of it.
- Not hearing “No”: I have tried. I really have. I have tried to explain why I am not the person to make introductions. I have even given David some complimentary coaching as to how he might better make use of his networking energy, time and money. Maybe next it’s the sledgehammer approach.
- Bad manners: Who explains to David that you don’t hold a dinner fork like a pitch fork? Or that when I introduce him to a prospective client, it is a good idea to stand up? I’m not his mother.
- Going solo: Too many people try to network in a vacuum. They feel embarrassed that they need something and don’t ask. Include others in your efforts. Come up with a team who will give you candid feedback. Maybe it is a good idea to get a new suit or take an etiquette class.
- Too much time online: I am a huge believer in using the many online networking sites. However, it is unrealistic to think you can forge a worthwhile relationship without picking up the phone or meeting in person.
- Forgetting to be yourself: Maybe you don’t like events. That’s fine. Find ways to networking in other ways. Be a speaker, write articles or volunteer. Attending events isn’t the only way to network. Having said that, it is worthwhile to be competent at it. Then you can focus time and energy on getting a one-on-one follow-up meeting.
- Insanity: The definition I like the most is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. If you aren’t getting what you want, pause — or even stop. Take a breath. Get some feedback and be willing to implement it.

Remember, whom you know may get you started, but how you proceed is the key to long-term success.

Will it pay off? And how.

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