

Scientific Networking

... or what to say after you say “hello”

Michael Harrison

We all have the opportunity to network. We attend trade shows, civic functions, business conferences, social affairs and sporting events. We can even create our own networks by establishing advisory boards or mastermind groups.

No matter which strategy you employ to meet people, the more structured your approach the more successful your results.

People deal with you for one of two reasons; the perception they have of you or the relationship you build with them. Subconsciously they are asking themselves; do you look like you can do what you say and can I trust you? Effective networking gives you the opportunity to subliminally answer these questions.

Most networking events have a mix of three types of people who may be of interest. Prospects are potential buyers of your product or service; influencers mix in circles where your prospects get together; and introducers can personally introduce you to prospects. They are all potential targets.

If possible, find out in advance who will be there. Often it is as easy as phoning the host or organiser and asking the question. Recently a conference organiser faxed me an acceptance list with 231 names of attendees together with their company details and addresses.

If that doesn't work you might be able to find a member of the committee or arrange a mutual friend to help you. If it is a civic or association event find out who the trustees or committee members are; if it is corporate find out the names of the directors. You never know who you may already know.

Prepare a list of people you want to meet. If you can't get names set numeric targets. If you are at an all day conference decide how many people you want to meet in the morning, afternoon and at dinner.

It shouldn't need to be said, but always check the appropriate dress? You should be dressed at

least as well as the best-dressed person in the room. You also need to be equipped to take notes.

Be clear about what you hope to learn at the event. I like to get some basic information, promise to send something of value and move on. That way I maximise my time. What I offer to send depends on what I learn. It might be contact details for someone of interest, an article I have written, a book, or something else.



Learning about the people you meet is the most interesting and enjoyable part of networking. People love to talk about themselves. My objective is to find out their FORM.

FORM is an acronym for:

F – Family spouse, parents, children, even pets

O – Occupation, not just what they do now, but how they got started

R – Recreation, hobbies, interests, favourite restaurant, sporting interests

M – Money, because dreams have price tags

I try to find out what he or she does what they have done previously, how they relax, who is important in their life and where they would like to be in the future.

Here is part of a typical conversation.

“Hi, I'm Michael Harrison.”

“Hi Michael, my name is Sarah Turner.”

“Nice to meet you Sarah, what brings you to this event?”

"I am with Corporate Supplies. We supply printing and stationery to a lot of the companies in this association. What about you?"

"I work with people who want to maximise the value of their business. How long have you been in the stationery business Sarah?"

"About three years now. What does maximise the value of your business mean Michael. Are you a consultant?"

"Yes. I specialise in profit improvement and exit strategies for business owners. Tell me Sarah how long have you been in this role?"

Notice how I keep shifting the conversation back to Sarah. My objective is to learn the names of partners, children and other people who are important, how Sarah relaxes and has fun, what her role is and where she wants to end up – without being pushy. This is a starting point not an interrogation.

Depending on how the conversation flows I might ask one or more of:

- What do you enjoy most about your job?
- What separates you and your company from your competitors?
- What advice would you give someone just starting out in the stationery business?
- What do you see as the coming trends in the stationery business?
- Which methods have you found are the most effective for promoting your business?

And I always ask,

- How would I know if someone I'm talking to is a good prospect for you?

My objective is to listen and learn so I will wind up the conversation by saying something like, "Sarah, you might be interested in a paper I wrote about how people can maximise the value of their business. Would you like me to send you a copy?"

No one says 'no'. Offering to send something is non-threatening. And, if I haven't already got it, this is the perfect opportunity to get Sarah's business card.

Sarah might not be a prospect but she could be a great introducer. Her customers are small business owners.

After the event, write a handwritten note to everyone you meet and send it within 48 hours. Say you enjoyed meeting him or her and learning a little about their business and tell them you will refer business if you can.

It is important to send or supply what you promised after the event. No one wants to carry extra baggage and it gives you the perfect reason to get back in touch. Follow up with a phone call a few days later. Where it goes from there is up to you.

Succeeding in business is not about who you know, it is about who knows you.

The people you meet want to know five things about you:

- Who you are
- What you do
- Who you do it for
- What makes you different
- How you can make their life easier

Make sure you cover off those points in your marketing material or conversations.

Debrief yourself after each networking event. Were the people who attended the same as you expected? Did you meet your objectives? Did you meet the people you planned? If you paid to attend, was it money well spent? Did you follow-up? What could you have done differently or better?

Networking is a great marketing strategy. Used properly, it will help you maximise the value of your business.

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A noted business speaker, author and consultant, Michael is the creator of the Mini Guide to Business series and the author of two books and numerous articles about business success and related topics.

This article offers an insight into some of the concepts he uses to assist clients to maximize value.

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