



The First Step to Effective Networking

Business networking is the connection of people for the purpose of exploring mutually beneficial business opportunities. It is about building relationships and assisting people to get 'what they want' while getting 'what you want'

Networking is not about acquiring as many business cards as you can, adding the contact details to your database and then bombarding contacts with information.

To network effectively, you need to begin with the end in mind:

- **Who do you want to meet?**
 - Are you aiming to meet people who are likely to be your clients?
 - Do you want to meet people who could be a mentor to you?
 - Do you want to meet like-minded people to share experiences with?
- **Who would be good referral sources?**

A good referral source is someone who interacts with your desired customers on a regular basis. The challenge would be to identify how to meet such people. For example, a business coach who works with start-ups may look for referrals from accountants, attorneys, career counsellors, and people who teach small business classes.
- **What do you want to learn?**
 - Do you want to meet people to gain knowledge in your field?
 - Do you want to meet persons who have already done what you hope to do e.g. venture into new markets?
 - Do you need skills complementary to what you already know? E.g. If you are in marketing, it may be good to spend some time with a web-designer to find out what works and what does not work in internet marketing.

The best business networking groups operate as exchanges of business information, ideas, and support.

That does not mean that you confine your networking to just Professional & Industry Groups, Current & Former Co-workers, Customers and Vendors. Don't forget your "old school ties" and your NS buddies!

Alumni associations and social interest groups allow you to network more informally. Getting yourself involved in projects or volunteering to be on committees, allow you to enjoy a hobby as well as establish yourself as a dependable team player or a leader who initiates improvements. Both are qualities that will generate respect and nurture goodwill in your business or professional network.

Also, identify and use your existing networks.

- Do your extended family and friends fully understand what you do?
- Do they know your client profile and what it is you need to achieve?

They can refer you to potential clients should an opportunity arise within their professional and personal networks. This is very much like providing a recommendation for others to access the services of any professional, or get the best travel deal -- or the best char kway teow in town!

So, the first step to networking is to **determine your goals** and then identify groups, persons or events that can help you.

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