

Is Your Net Working?

20.5 ways to adjust your net when your networking is not working

By Melissa McGavick, WBN Cranberry Chapter Member, WBN President of the Board 2009 -2010

Networking: you're supposed to do it, but how? People have always preferred to do business with people they know like and trust. The advent of the formalized networking group has changed the face of networking. There are more and more available groups with varying levels of commitment and results. From the broad scope of chamber memberships to lead groups to specifically defined center of influence groups, people are joining in record numbers with the intent of finding new business. This enormous desire to meet as many people as possible has diluted the effectiveness of the networking relationships. It is becoming increasingly critical to learn to stand out from the crowd to gain and maintain market share.

Whether you are a networking novice looking to learn the basics or a polished professional networker, I hope the 20.5 helpful hints listed below will be of value to you and your business.

Happy Networking!
Melissa

1. **Know what networking is and what it isn't.** Networking is not an excuse for not working. Networking is a 24-hour activity you should do on a consistent basis. The objective of building mutually beneficial relationships with other members of your community can take longer than you wish. Sometimes it takes years before it will bear fruit. Sometimes it will take root in a one-time meeting. Relationships tend to grow slowly. Like drilling a well before you are thirsty, building a network should be done before you need it.

Appreciate those who seem to not be in the same market space as you, the connection may not always be apparent. There are countless stories of the connections made and sales won through the most unlikely of referral sources.

Networking is not a way for you to push your goods and services onto other event attendees. Normally that type of behavior hurts your chances of ever making a connection or a sale.

2. **Have a Strategy.** Decide who you want to connect with, where is best to connect with them and when are they going to be most receptive to your approach to network. How will you contact them? What environment are you most at ease connecting with them? Who do you already know whom you haven't seen in a while? Make a plan to reach them and write it down.
3. **Have a goal.** When you attend an event have a goal of having two to three significant conversations rather than meeting everyone in the room. You are more likely to be successful in meeting a few of them and since you can focus on meeting on just a couple of people they will not feel like they have been run over by the networking truck when your conversation has ended.
4. **Execute your plan and track your results.** Set your goal date for achieving your goals. It can be as simple as calling one person by Friday. Maybe you want to attend three networking lunches this week and reconnect with five people via phone. Make a decision and then keep a file of who you have talked with, about what and the results.

Set aside a specific time in your day planner to return calls and extend new networking invitations. Having it scheduled makes it more likely to happen.

5. **Luck favors the prepared.** When attending events know the agenda as much as possible and learn about your host, the speaker, the venue and who else is attending.

Dress appropriately for the event and the audience you are looking to attract. If this is a tuxedo crowd a string bikini swimsuit would be uncomfortable for you and the people you are talking with.

Carry plenty of clean crisp business cards and a pen with you. You will use the pen to jot notes on the back of collected business cards to help remind yourself of promises you have made to follow up with information or the interesting article you discussed.

6. **Get excited.** If you tend to be overwhelmed when meeting groups of new people focus on meeting one at a time. Focus your energies on making other people comfortable rather than yourself almost as if you were the host. By concentrating on their needs we will not have time to worry about our own anxieties.
7. **Learn the art of small talk.** Questions are a great way to get other people talking. Questions help you to get to know other attendees by engaging them in friendly banter. Two to try are; "How do you know our host?" and "What is your interest in this evening's topic?" However question after question can feel like an interrogation. Before you attend an event think about what are questions you are likely to be asked and how you want your answer to sound. Read about what is happening in your business community, the world at large, even fashion as well as having a hobby you are excited to discuss. Become an expert in something other than what you are paid to do. This will make you a more interesting conversationalist.

8. **Go out of your way to strike up conversations.** When you are in the ladies room, foyer, elevator, lobby or parking lot, talk with the people around you. Ask if they are attending the same networking meeting you are. If not maybe they are attending another event that you would find to be of interest. Ask if they had trouble with traffic or finding the venue. Just start talking!!!
 9. **Name tags are mini billboards so use them.** Most events provide nametags. When you arrive place yours on your right hand upper chest area or lapel. As you reach to shake hands your right side extends forward making it easier to read it.

Look at their name tag to visually anchor their face and name together in your memory. Many times name tags will give you additional information such as company, title or town. These can be great conversation starters.
 10. **Create interest in what you do.** Know how to describe what you do in 30 seconds in an intriguing way, leaving them wanting to learn more. Time it and practice it. This should be a mini infomercial not a dissertation on the advantages of why they need you.
 11. **Learn to read your audience.** Are her eyes glazed over while you drone on and on about how you can solve all of her problems?
 12. **Seek out those who are seeking you.** When you enter a room, take a moment to glance over the room for returned eye contact and a smile. These non-verbal cues are a good indication of a person open to conversation. People who are by themselves are often easier to approach than those who are actively involved in a conversation of many.
 13. **Be strategic in your choice of seat.** If seats have not been assigned you can be selective about with whom you wish to sit. Are there a couple of choice people you would like to meet? If space permits claim your seat at their table. It will be easier insert yourself into a table of three or four with open seats than it will be a table of seven to eight that has to squeeze you in. The table with fewer guests will be more likely to include you into conversation immediately and be grateful for your input.
 14. **Wear a watch.** Be aware of the amount of time you spend listening versus the time you spend listening. A good rule to follow is to listen twice as much as you talk.

Honor other people's time. Don't be the last to leave a party. The host is tired and wants to go home too. Leave gracefully and don't wear out your welcome.
 15. **Invest in a good contact management system.** Today there are almost more solutions than people to use them. You can use an electronic system or an old fashioned paper address book. The choice is yours. Just keep it up-to-date and use it to stay in contact.
 16. **You get what you give.** Reach out to your contacts on a regular basis to learn how you can help them. This is often called the givers-gain. Can you offer expertise in area of frustration for them? Is there someone you can refer to them that would a great help?
 17. **Follow-up.** Write short handwritten notes stating you are happy to have met them or you were thinking of them. When you come across an article that would be of interest to a particular person, cut it out and send it to them with a sticky note attached stating, "Thought you'd be interested in this article." Be creative in future contacts. Invite them to lunch just because. Send them notes and remember important days like birthdays, anniversaries and other celebrations.

Use newsletters or email newsletters to stay in contact and provide information they will find of value. Honor their wishes to be contacted or not contacted this way.
 18. **Contribute to the good fortune of others.** When opportunities present themselves sometimes it is not the right time or maybe you're just not interested. Recommend it to someone who will appreciate the opportunity. This applies to bidding on accounts, following through with services, special offers or sales, open jobs, theater tickets and anything else of value to someone. Pass it on!
 19. **Respect their name, phone number and email address.** Before you pass out any contacts information, get permission. Just because someone selling something has asked to be introduced to a key contact, the feeling may not be mutual. The prospect may not be interested in being hounded to buy a lifetime supply of wax fruit.
 20. **Be grateful.** If someone refers you to someone or offers you tips or advice, thank them even if it doesn't work out. They could have referred your competitor or kept the information to themselves.
- 20.5 **Make it a game.** Have fun.

In networking you have to play to win.



About the Author: Melissa McGavick is President of McGavick Interactive Training, and a professional public speaker. Typically she works with successful business people who want to develop their public speaking and communication skills, leadership potential, and sell their ideas or products more effectively. She can be reached at by phone at 412-400-3414. More information is available at www.mcgavick.net.

Melissa has served as a Chapter Rep and Chapter Chair of the Cranberry WBN chapter, chaired ten different WBN committees, served as both Vice-President (2008-2009) and President (2009-2010) of the WBN Board of Directors. In 2008 she was selected as the WBN Woman of the Year. Melissa has also served in the top leadership positions in four other non-profit organizations, including the Pittsburgh chapter of the Downtown Women's Club, Women Entrepreneurs in Business, Women Think P.I.N.K., and Toastmasters International District 13.