



Networking is not about selling

When I first started out in my business I was urged by a well known sales guru to network my heart out; "put yourself out there Jean, give everyone you meet your business card".

Scary stuff for one stepping out on a limb already! For a bright woman it took me a long time to get my head around the fact that networking is not about sales or selling me and my business.

In fact I know now that my business card is the least powerful tool in my networking tool box. My email signature and website, which is consistent with my business card and flyers, is though. Why? Because follow up is the most powerful tool when it comes to networking effectively and follow up starts with that friendly email which will, nine times out of ten, become part of the other persons database with all my details including a link to my website.

People remember you for what you give; your time, attention, interest and a genuine invitation to get to know them and their business better. As a consequence of building and maintaining a relationship you and your business, product or service become inextricably linked in the mind and memory of the person you link to.

Having become somewhat of a serial networker, no longer uncomfortable or leery of the unknown, I am now excited and stimulated by the amount of truly interesting people out there. I am also forever reminded of what a small world it is. Auckland is small, New Zealand is small and the world now is also small. Not only do I keep bumping into people I know at an event or meeting when I least expect it; I am constantly meeting people who it turns out know people I know and hey presto an immediate connection is made. People are 100 times more comfortable with strangers when a common link presents itself.

While not everyone is going to be a prospective client or sale, they might instead become a valuable supplier or contact for your own clients or customers. A good networker is also a good match maker and 'marriage' broker! Regardless they will potentially know people who could become a client or customer.

Whether you are self employed, a business owner or manager or an employee networking is vital to the expansion of your influence and profile as

well as being the ideal opportunity to give others a step up or the support you were given.

Recently I was a panel speaker at a conference for women who almost without exception worked for the public service or related public sector organisations. They totally embraced the concept of creating their own internal networks, rather like the workplace equivalent of coffee groups. Giving them the opportunity to share resources, build working relationships, problem solve and generally support and encourage each other. Not to mention building their reputation in the workplace and opening doors for career advancement.

Networking is nothing more than people needing people in action. Fill the need and your needs will get filled in return. It may take a while however the return on your networking 'investment' is guaranteed and will oil the wheels of your business growth and success. You might also find that you enjoy it and become a serial networker and business match maker too.

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