

Business

THE HOUR

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Negative networking: Build relationships, don't burn bridges

All month you've been looking forward to tonight's event. Several people you'd like to do business with will be there. This should be a great opportunity to make some new connections.

You arrive early with a pocketful of business cards and an armload of brochures fresh from the printer. As people start to arrive you rush over to meet them. You talk for a couple of minutes then ask to exchange business cards. You make sure to hand them one of your brochures before moving on. In the first half-hour you've introduced yourself to ten people.

Mindful of the time you keep one eye on your watch. You continually scan the crowd so you don't miss one of the more important people you came to connect with. You say a hasty good bye when you spot the president of XYZ Company entering the room.

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As soon as you get her attention you go into the 15-minute version of your sales presentation.

At the end of the evening, you're tired but happy. This networking idea is great. You pat your pocket, thinking about the 25 business cards you've collected. Most of the new brochures are gone. You're glad you brought so many materials; it was much quicker and easier to hand out brochures than to explain what you do to everyone.

The next morning you go through the business cards. You eagerly add the names to your customer list. Since you've heard following up is important, you immediately

send each of your new contacts additional information on your business. Pleased with your efforts, you wait for the phone to ring. Two months later you're still waiting.

What went wrong? All you did was make superficial connections. Networking is not about selling your services and making deals. It's about building long-term, mutually beneficial relationships. And building relationships takes time.

Networking is the single most effective way to get what you want personally and professionally. Because people like to do business with people they know. Unfortunately people with the best of intentions sometimes fall into negative networking. Instead of trying to make long-term connections, they look for instant results.

Running from event to event handing out business cards and collecting names are the hall-

marks of negative networking. Selling yourself over dinner is another faux pas. These techniques are guaranteed to alienate potential clients and turn decision makers off.

Forget about selling and focus on communicating. Which usually means talking less and listening more. As you head off to your association's next luncheon keep these six practices in mind:

- ▶ Put business cards in your pocket. Leave the brochures at the office.

- ▶ Spend time with people. Find out what they do and how you might be able to help them.

- ▶ Focus on the person you're talking with. Don't keep eyeing your watch or scanning the room for someone more important.

- ▶ Never give someone your sales pitch when you first meet. Save that for a future meeting.

- ▶ Try to really connect with two people at each event. Fol-

low-up with a brief note, don't send your sales materials without asking.

- ▶ When you click with someone, arrange to get together again. Meeting for coffee is a great way to get to know each other better.

Remember, networking is all about attitude. Don't be short-sighted. Concentrate on long-term developing relationships. Stay open to opportunities; you never know who knows who or where you will make your next great connection.

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