

**Advice for the “Networking Weary”:  
Or, “If You Are Going To All the  
Trouble, You May As Well Do It  
Right!”**

It’s not news to savvy business executives that person-to-person relationship building is an essential part of the new business development process. Meeting other business leaders in person through networking is consistently ranked as one of the most effective ways to create qualified prospects. But, who has not been in the position of ending up with a pile of business cards from an evening of local chamber networking, for instance, and wondering if it was worth the time and effort? Some will even say “I’m exhausted” and seriously question whether I should continue this kind of activity?”.

So, what can be done to turn the time and effort required for business networking into results that matter? We have developed some valuable tips for the *Networking-Weary*. Implementing these ideas will make a difference and boost your networking effectiveness.

**Stay Focused on Why You Are Networking and Who You Want to Meet**

We believe there are four critical factors that impact the quality and overall effectiveness of business networking: These factors are:

- The venue or “fishing pond” you’ve chosen for doing your networking;
- Clarity about (the profile for) *who* you want to meet;
- A plan for your conversation when you meet the “right ones”;
- A follow up plan that is simple and doable – or it’s all a waste of time.

When you are *selective* about the networking venues you attend, you are off to a good start. Setting your sites on the groups best known for attracting senior level people – particularly those who own and lead businesses - is a good start. These options are around but it will require some diligence to find them and get invited. It is well worth the effort. You can develop significant business networking skills but if you regularly “fish in the wrong pond” it’s all for naught.

It is important to remember that you are not networking to meet the *most* people possible but to meet the *right* ones. We encourage you to look for the “right ones” in two categories: (1) ones who show promising potential to match up well with your firm’s Ideal Client Profile, and (2) ones who show smart networking prowess and are clearly good connectors in circles that matter to your business.

**Special Edition**

From time to time we brainstorm with a business colleague noted for outstanding performance in a particular area. This briefing is devoted to proven ideas for effective business networking—and a recognition of those who dread it and/or think they not good at doing it. So, we called on a business colleagues whose networking skills make him a very effective connector. This briefing expresses the collective wisdom that results from our collaboration with Tom Caprel, founder of Breakthrough Results,



Our experience is that many people take a stab at the first category and are effective to a greater or lesser degree depending on how much time and effort they put into honing this skill. Experience also tells us that the second category is often over-looked and misunderstood. If you think about the attributes and characteristics of a networking pro – the great connectors - you will likely notice:

- An engaging communication style;
- Considerable business knowledge;
- Genuine inquisitiveness about you and your business;
- A confident way of expressing themselves;
- Comments that make you think they are as willing to *give* as to get;
- ...and you may have the thought that you could confidently introduce them to *your clients* because they would make a favorable impression; they pass the credibility test.

There is much more that can be said about these types of sophisticated networker/connectors. But if you take the time to think it through, you will be prepared to “know one when you see one”. These professionals are well worth a follow-up. Cultivating them will improve the results you get from business networking. In those all-important post-networking event follow up meetings to get to know one and other better, you can begin to build a relationship with a business professional who knows how to make mutually beneficial introductions that lead to more and better business all around.

We believe that many business professionals miss good networking opportunities because they have not thought ahead – created a strategy if you will – about how to have an effective conversation when the “right ones” show up. We see so many people do their “elevator pitch” as their conversation starter. It’s often a dud. After two people shoot their elevator speeches at one and other, then what? Does the conversation devolve into talking about the local sport teams? stories? Too many times it does.

If you plan ahead for what you want to accomplish with contacts you meet in categories 1 and 2, you are more likely to get what you need from your business networking. We suggest that one key goal of your networking should be to leave your *desired new contacts* with a genuine interest in talking with you again; second conversation lead to more detailed understandings of one and others business. That valuable second conversation will lead to learning more about you and your business - *because you spent most of the initial time together learning about theirs*. So have a ready repertoire of good questions that get people talking about themselves and their at more than the usual e elevator drill level. Some examples are:

- Where are you from in the area?
  - Have you always been from (...what they said)?
  - If not from what brought you here?
  - Was it your current business?
- What caused you to get into your business – and what do you like most about it?

Most will agree that new contacts do not become clients and/or good referral relationships as the result of a first-time meeting. It is not the initial meeting that creates the understanding and trust to realize that mutual “wins” are likely. But, effective follow up will help you accomplish that all-important goal. Recognize that networking done well creates the opportunity to execute effective follow up.

### **The “Secret Sauce” (or *basics*) of Effective Follow-Up**

We are all busy and therefore networking follow-up all too frequently remains a plan – not action

Some professionals are put off by their own fears or, as we call it, the “reluctant networker syndrome”. Implementing follow-up as a routine, methodical activity – another key process in your business – is an efficient way to get the job done despite your fears. Plan ahead and organize your assets, resources and steps so that follow up becomes completely doable. Here are *the basics* of an effective follow up process:

- Organize new contacts into categories e.g., A = Potential clients, B = Savvy connectors, C= Stay in Touch (more to be learned).
- Ensure that the new contact information is in your Outlook or other data repository for easy access.
- Within a few days of your first meeting, send a “standardized” note or email to all A and B contacts. (The standardized message will encourage more conversation and alert them that you will call or make contact again soon.)
- Devote an hour or so each week to calling your A and B contacts to schedule a time to meet again and/or leave a short voice-mail that you want to meet again; it’s that personal touch that can make a real difference.
- When you do have a follow up meeting with your A and B contacts make sure that stay in touch as required to build a few casual meetings into a relationship over time.
- Reach out to your A and B contacts about once a month with a general email update about topics that help to keep mutual interest moving along – recent PR, reflections on topical business news, etc. Repetitive contact executed in a professional way is affordable and powerful.

Remember that we have noted these elements as “*the basics*” because there is much more that can be done to implement a robust outreach program. But, if you do not have all the basics in place then start with the ideas we noted. We are great believers that it makes very good sense to walk before your run.

If you would like to talk about your business networking – and get some assistance from us to make it better – please be in touch. We love to help others achieve real success!

#### **About Marketplace Partners ([www.marketplace-partners.com](http://www.marketplace-partners.com))**

For over 15 years we have successfully served B2B Professional Services organizations in the greater Chicago area. Our management consulting and marketing services are designed specifically for business owners and executive teams committed to accelerating the profitable growth of their firm. Leveraging our proprietary and on-going research with C-level buyers of services, we propel our clients into new services, new markets, more revenue, better margins and timely results. We help clients close the gap between their business plan and the strategic marketing and practical performance required to effectively grow a professional services business in a competitive market.

#### **About Breakthrough Results, Inc. ([www.break-through.us](http://www.break-through.us))**

We specialize in services that deliver a powerful blend of management consulting, business architecture and leadership facilitation to growth-oriented business leaders. Our services have been described as *transformative* for individuals and companies. Transformation is demonstrated in unprecedented bottom line results being achieved in accelerated timeframes. We also develop improved working relationships (even in adverse situation) as well as enabling high-quality teamwork and collaboration to become the norm within a company’s culture.