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Networking: Beyond the Elevator Speech

By Mark Dembo

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"Networking" has become one the sales bywords in recent years. Many will tell you that the key to building your sales is to "network" effectively. There is no question that building a strong network can be incredibly helpful to your sales efforts. Nevertheless, many people in sales face the same difficulties in networking that they face in cold-calling. It sounds great, yet for some reason they just don't seem to be able to do it effectively. Let's look at some of the factors and see if we can debunk some of this.

Exactly what is "networking?" The first thing comes to mind for many salespeople is that networking about finding customers without having to make cold calls! A common perception is that networking means going to a lot of events, meeting as many people as you can (also called "working the room"), handing out your business cards to "qualified" prospects, and then waiting for them to call you. Once you've met all these qualified people at an event, the thinking goes, you can call them up the following day or week to instantly secure an appointment to do business with them. When this doesn't happen, our erstwhile networker gets discouraged, concluding that she is just not a good networker, and that the people she needs to sell to just aren't going to the same "networking" events she is.

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, a network is a "fabric or structure of cords or wires that cross at regular intervals and are knotted or secure at the crossings." If we rewrite that definition a bit for sales purposes, we could say that a network is a "structure of people and contacts that cross at regular intervals and are secure at the crossings."

Notice that this definition does not say anything about handing out business cards, giving elevator speeches, or closing business. Does that mean that networking is a waste of time or that you shouldn't be doing these things?

Not at all. However, to reap the rewards, you do need to rethink your approach and expectations from your networking efforts. Building an effective network means making an ongoing investment in other people, without an expectation of anything in return.

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"What", you say? "That's blasphemy! How can I spend time networking without getting anything in return?"

No - that's not what I said. I said not to EXPECT anything in return. Your only goal for networking should be having other people view you as a valuable resource and as a part of THEIR network. Wow - when you start thinking of it this way, you can begin to see and reap the benefits of a strong network. Networks take time to build and nurture. In addition, just as in a direct selling situation, the most effective networkers focus on what they can do for the people they meet without focusing on what the other person can do for them. Over time, you build credibility as someone who truly cares about other people, is trustworthy, reliable, and a good person to know. That's when the benefits begin to come back to you.

The real power in networking comes from understanding a simple fact; everyone you know and each

person you meet knows on average 250 people. Your goal in networking should not be to get the people you meet to become your customers - it should be to become a part of THEIR network, and for them to become a part of yours. Every contact you make puts you at the reach of potentially another 250 people. Think of it as weaving an intricate web with many crossings. Every positive impression you make strengthens that web. As author Bob Burg puts it: "the true strength really comes though when we realize that all the people in our network are also parts of other people's networks that we ourselves don't personally know. And that, indirectly, makes each of those people part of our network too."

So, how do you get started?

Here are some tips:

- Don't approach networking with the expectation of immediate gratification; your goal is to meet people and to understand as much about them as you can.
- Don't give people you meet for the first time a "sales pitch."
- Don't get discouraged if you don't see things happen right away; true networks take time to build.
- Do ask questions about the other person.
- Do ask if you can stay in touch.
- Do send a follow-up note, and touch on a few things you discussed.
- Do take active steps on a regular basis to strengthen your network by both staying in touch with people you've connected with, and by finding ways to connect with new people.
- Do use networking as one of many tools in your arsenal for effective prospecting.

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– Do actively find ways to make connections between members of your network - remember making more and more connections is what it's all about.

– Do offer to do things for others in your network, even if there's no immediate promise of reward or reciprocation.

Start changing the way you think about networking and before long you will start to see the positive impact it can have.

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Raise Your Elevator Speech To The Top Floor With Powerful Emotions

By Michael Clark

If your elevator speech sparks a buyer's curiosity, it's only doing half the job. Your elevator speech should not only spark curiosity but also awaken powerful emotions. Small business owners can learn success from the Madison Avenue and branding experts about how to design advertisements and messages that drive consumers to feel and act upon their emotions.

While networking with other business leaders, I'm often surprised at how few utilize these techniques to their advantage. Below are a few examples of how to spark curiosity, make customers feel great and grow your business.

Here's a tagline, "We develop lasers that will cut your waste 20%." Sounds good; everyone loves saving. That should work, right? Not necessarily. Savings alone isn't enough. What if your competitor is telling prospects, "Our lasers cut your waste by 20% and that's the difference between staying in business or leading your industry." By adding the emotionally packed difference, the impact is doubled and takes the job away from you. Your competitor's "industry leading" emotional pitch demonstrates to prospects how the savings benefit will make them feel. Utilizing emotions constructively can be a real key to increasing sales.

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One executive organizer I know claims in her elevator speech that she gives executives an extra hour each day. That's great, but think how much more effective her pitch would be if she added an emotional component to it. Let's say she's talking to an executive who obviously works out regularly and she says to him, "With that extra hour, you can work out, stay fit, and not feel guilty about the time you are taking away from your family." She just tied together an ego boost for working out and family pride. Surely that will earn her additional sales.

You've probably heard a lot about selling by benefits instead of features. Combining inspiring and thought-provoking emotions with exceptional benefits moves your message from the bottom floor up to the Trump Tower level. Here's an example of combining an emotion that goes along with a benefit. If you're selling a man on a dozen red roses, which is the more powerful selling statement? "Women love roses. You can't go wrong with them." Or, "Send a dozen of these to your wife at her office and all the other women will be envious. Your wife will love you for boosting her watercooler esteem." The second message ties in two very strong emotions, pride and love, and makes the buyer eager to receive the benefits.

In order to find the emotions to power your elevator speech, analyze your products' benefits and find at least three strong emotions that you can bond to each one. Practice different ways to utilize these emotions in your pitch. And keep it positive! Fear is old school.

If you follow the steps outlined above, I guarantee you'll profit by setting more meetings and receiving additional sales. Won't it feel good to be the one relaxing on a tropical beach enjoying the benefits?

Michael Clark

Business consultant and professional speaker Michael Clark has been helping businesses including Fortune 500 companies such as IBM and Cellular One succeed for over 20 years. For more small business success articles, go to

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