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The Art of Networking

By Alvin Apple

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Before there were computers and the Internet, before television and radio, before phones and electricity, business people still had to find ways to promote their businesses. The archaic promotional technique they used is still in practice today. The technique I speak of is networking; probably the oldest, most accepted, and least expensive means of promoting yourself or your business.

But why worry about networking, when modern technology allows us to do all our marketing and promotions without ever speaking to another human being? Because real human interaction is usually a better gauge of how well you are presenting your message, than a marketing survey.

Networking not only helps you stay informed of how individuals feel about what you do, but also allows you to position yourself in the marketplace and stay on the cutting edge. With networking, you spin a web of tangible relationships and powerful alliances.

However, before you start shmoozing with the best of them, you need to learn how to approach people. You can't just walk up to a stranger in the food court line and start jabbering about your business. There is an art to networking that starts with learning how to approach people.

Notice what books, magazines, and newspapers people carry. Say you own an interior design company and you see someone reading a magazine like "Better Homes and Gardens." Maybe you've read an article in that magazine that you can discuss with this person.

Comment on the article or headline and try to get a conversation going. Be sure to ask the person what they do to discern whether this is a business contact or a potential customer.

Be careful about appearing to be an opportunist. Express genuine interest in what your contact's opinions are, and listen closely to what they say to find your "in point."

Remember, not everyone will be receptive to your efforts. If you limit your networking to approaching random people on the street, then chances are you will be rejected more often.

Networking at conferences, workshops, and organization meetings like the Chamber of Commerce are bound to elicit more results. But never ignore a chance to simply get out on the street and talk to regular people. You never know; you might gain your best customer while waiting for the bus.

Three Key Networking Principles for Women Professionals

By Michelle Goodwine

In order to break through the glass ceiling and reach gender equity, there are several key strategies that women professionals must adopt. One such strategy is networking.

There is no doubt that women, like men, need others' help to achieve our goals. Very few of us have gotten where we are in our careers without someone's assistance. Honestly we must admit that we may have been hired for a job because of whom we knew. And for us women entrepreneurs, much of the business we receive is through our personal contacts.

Networking Defined

So what is networking? According to "The Networking Book" by Jessica Lipnack and Jeffrey Stamps, "Networking is people connecting with people, linking ideas and resources." The book "Power Networking, 55 Secrets for Personal & Professional Success" states that networking is not: 1) Selling; 2) Using people for your gain; 3) Coercing or manipulating someone to do what you want; 4) Putting friends, neighbors, associates on the spot; or 5) Badgering people about your business.

Three Key Networking Principles

Based on these definitions, what should women professionals keep in mind when networking? The following three principles should guide every woman's networking approach:

1. Establish Relationships with Network

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When trying to "connect" with people, try to find areas of common interest -issues, ideas or activities that you share in common with the other person. Effective networking is not a "one-shot" deal. True networking requires establishing a long-term relationship with someone. And the best way to do that is to find out about that individual on a personal and business level.

2. Be Honest about Your Intentions

State why you are contacting an individual for help. Do not say you would like to conduct an informal interview if you are actually trying to get a job offer from the meeting rather than information. Your honesty will result in people be more willing to assist you.

3. Reciprocate

Networking is a two way street. So if someone has assisted you, make it a priority to help her down the road. However, do not expect something for someone just because you did something for her. Sometimes that person may not be in the position to help you. However, personally I believe that if you help someone out of the goodness of your heart, it is the "order of the universe" that someone will help you one day. And remember, it has been said, that it is better to give than to receive.

These three key principles have one common element - treating people with respect. By applying these principles, we can enrich our lives professionally and personally.

Michelle Goodwine is President and Founder of Integrated HR Strategies, the only African-American, woman-owned strategic human resources consulting firm in the country. For more information about her company's services, visit

. Visit Michelle's website at

www.michellegoodwine.net for information about her professional speaking experience or e-mail her at michelle@michellegoodwine.net. Copyright © 2004 Integrated HR Strategies. All Rights Reserved.

Three Key Networking Principles for Women Professionals

A beginners guide to networking

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