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Awakening Leadership Within

The Top 10 Most Effective Behaviors at a Networking Event

Networking events offer an opportunity to introduce yourself and your business to a select, targeted group of people. These people are potential clients as well as potential sources of referral. How you introduce yourself will make an impact on them and will determine whether or not they actually remember you and your product or service.

1. **Join the right groups.** Time and energy are as valuable as money. Seek out those organizations whose members can help develop your business. Some groups will provide clients, some will provide support services and some will provide strategic alliances. What do you need? Choose the organizations you belong to with that question in mind.

2. **Plan in advance.** Don't go to a networking function unprepared. Know in advance who will be there, what will be the format of the event. Determine how many business cards you may need to bring, what type of collateral would be most appropriate to this event and group.

3. **Know the culture of the group.** Some groups may be more rigid with regards to how much self-promotion can be done, or what kinds of material and how much of it you might bring with you for display. Don't leave yourself open to a business or social etiquette "faux pas". Those tend to leave lasting impressions and not the kind of impression that works for you.

4. **Get organized.** Bring something to write with and on. Whether you need to jot down a name or address, or if you want to make yourself a reminder or take notes, you will need to bring the right tools. Don't bring a spiral schoolbook either. A professional looking portfolio with paper and a place to slip in handouts would represent a business demeanor. Or if you are technologically inclined, a PDA would be small and convenient to bring and the information could later be downloaded into your computer. If you know you someone you wish to meet will be attending, learn about their background in advance and ask others who may know that person to provide an introduction at the event.

5. **Bring a business card holder.** What does it say to you when someone takes your business card and shoves it into their pocket? You know it will be crumpled up and they probably won't remember who you are. Do not do the same to someone else. In Japan, courtesy is shown by how one receives the business card of the other, with respect, turning it over and placing it

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gingerly in a place where it is kept neat and in good condition. You don't have to bow in the United States, but show some respect for someone else's collateral. They will remember you did so.

6. **Don't push your card or collateral on someone.** You want the right people to have your card, not necessarily everyone. Qualify those who would value having your collateral, then offer them your business card.

7. **Develop a conversation; begin a relationship before introducing your "elevator speech".** A networking function is an ideal way to have people get to know you. But in business as well as in personal dealings, it is best to create a relaxed and personal environment in which to introduce your services. Stay focused on what your goals are in attending the function, and gear your conversations to support those goals.

8. **Seek out valuable contacts.** Don't wait for people to come to you. If there is someone in the group with who you want to become acquainted, seek them out. Let them know that you are interested in their business, perhaps as a vendor or as a strategic alliance. Share with them what you may have in common. Develop them as a referral source. Or if they seem like a likely potential client, find out by asking open ended questions and listening to them closely.

9. **Debrief.** Take quick notes at the networking event to remind yourself to do something you promised or as a means to remember a specific conversation with someone. Jot down your observations for follow up later. You may not remember those important things if you don't jot them down.

10. **Follow-up.** The real value of the networking event is found as much in the follow-up as in the participation. Be sure to keep any promises you may have made to individuals at the event. Perhaps you promised to e-mail an article of interest or resource to someone. You may have invited someone to join you for a one-on-one conversation about your business or an opportunity for collaboration. Or through your listening and questioning you may have determined good candidates for your services. Give them a call, or write them a note or send them an e-mail with something of value as an attachment along with a specific, targeted collateral piece.

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