

BENEFITS

ACCESS

OPPORTUNITIES

NETWORKING

CONNECTIONS

The Advantages of Networking

Is it time to grow your circle of business contacts? Learn about what others have to offer? Give your office or organization credibility?

Networking in its purest form is simply talking to people, making connections and developing rapport to grow your circle of influence. By developing long-term relationships for mutual gain and creating lasting impressions with people you will be learning a life skill which has many applications for you both personally and professionally.

Business networking should focus the attention on growing your organization and developing two-way dialogues that have benefits to all parties involved.

When you network you give and receive. Here are a few benefits of networking:

1. **Information sharing**– The depth of knowledge and experience from a group of people can be staggering. Networking will provide many opportunities to ask questions and receive feedback. Discussing other points of view really expands your knowledge base, and allows you to see things from a broader perspective. Learning from other’s “best practices” saves time, energy and resources.

2. **Connections**– When opportunity “knocks” you want to be in a position to take advantage of it. Many times there is a need for information-sharing, joint ventures, partnerships, and even needs for services. Having a wide network of individuals to contact may be the difference in seizing the moment or missing it completely.

3. **Promotion**– Whether promoting yourself or your organization, having a large network may assist you in moving your career forward, promoting a new product launch, or driving new members to your organization. “Word of mouth” is still one of the best forms of advertising. Spreading good information about you or your organization may provide leads for career advancement or organization growth.

4. **Credibility**– Improving your reputation and finding support are also benefits of networking. If you are successful at networking, you might get a reputation for being a person people will want to talk to and get to know. A good reputation leads to support. You may have valuable information, ideas, and resources those in your network may need. Establishing your desire to assist a colleague increases your credibility.

5. **Self Esteem**– Making new friends and socializing is an important aspect of our

human nature. Developing new relationships leads to higher self esteem and confidence. By taking the steps to improving yourself and connecting to people you are moving your career forward. Your confidence will continue to grow as you become more comfortable with networking. Confidence draws people to you and opens up the opportunity to gain more information for yourself and share information with others.

Opportunities for potential networking venues and partners may be found by:

- Attending Chambers of Commerce meetings
- Working with community service groups like Lions, Jaycees or Kiwanis
- Volunteering for non-profit organizations
- Hosting your own networking event
- Looking in your local newspaper for networking events that are open to the public
- Attending industry related events at the local, state, regional, or national levels

Face-to-face networking has many advantages, but don't forget about social networks. They offer advantages as well. Social networks enable people who share the same interests to communicate with each other without geographical barriers. They allow you to meet new friends, promote your organization, and it won't cost you a thing.

It is sometimes more convenient to network from your home or office rather than in person. You may be more relaxed communicating in this format where you can take your time answering questions rather than being expected for an immediate reply.

There are plenty of online forum and discussion groups you can join with similar interests or organization goals. You may decide to meet with some of the people you have met from such networking resources.

The important thing to remember about networking is the growth you will experience by putting yourself "out there" and taking steps to improving yourself and your organization.



TIPS

- When attending an event in person, try to find out in advance who are the attendees
- Research Web pages to find out information and items for discussion topics
- Make sure you have your business cards with you to easily provide your contact information.
- After talking with someone, take a moment to write something on the back of their business card that will boost your memory later. Something distinctive about them such as how they were dressed, accent, color of hair, etc.
- Remember you only get one "first impression" so make it good, smile!
- Put more emphasis in LISTENING to them rather than speaking
- Prepare an 30 second biography that you can comfortably present to others
- Compile a list of five questions that you can ask to "spark" conversation
- Get involved once you are there. Participate in discussions, and be visible
- Attend a networking event at least once a month. Practice makes perfect

The Best Networking Begins with Planning and Taking Action

Article Sources:

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