

HOW TO

BY DOUG PACKARD

Learn to love networking

Most people agree that success in life is primarily about relationships. More importantly, the quality and depth of your relationships will determine your level of happiness. It really comes down to who you know, how well you know them and how much they care about you.

All relationships start with networking but many people dread the process. However, if you create a plan — including clarifying your goals — and work hard on being sincere and likable, you are likely to enjoy success and actually come to love networking and its benefits.

Their viewpoint counts most

As you begin networking conversations, focus on the other person's perspective. Here's the thought order most people go through as they listen to you (even though they don't realize it):

1. Do I like this person?
2. Do they care about me?
3. Can they help me?

If the person you approach does not like you, or if they sense you do not care about them, they won't consider if what you have to offer might be of value to them. Many networkers fail because they jump to the third step too quickly.

Plan-Do-Adjust: The 10/80/10 paradigm

Another roadblock that prevents networking success is spending too much time planning and never jumping into the arena. Others fail to plan or never adjust their approach. I generally recommend the 10/80/10 paradigm: Spend 10% of your networking time on planning, 80% on doing, and 10% on adjusting.

The "plan phase" includes defining your targets based on a description of your perfect prospect, for which you need to define the common attributes of your best customers.

Once you have defined your target, you need to find out where they hang out. This includes the business and personal functions they attend, publications they read and online tools they use. Uncovering this information gives you an idea of where and when you can approach your targets.

Next, you need to create a compelling "elevator pitch" so that once you establish likability and demonstrate you care, you can effectively communicate how you can help. How well you communicate also impacts how much they like you and whether they think you truly care about them.

Create a message that's not only understandable, memorable and unique, but also leaves people wanting to hear more — to the point where they ask questions. This opens the door to go into a bit more detail and, more importantly, to explore their needs.

For the "do phase," look for opportunities to give something of value to the people you network with.

Suggestions for this tactic include asking them to describe their perfect prospect so you can look for referrals for them. You could also suggest helpful resources, tools, books or events.

And don't forget, the first step is likability. To accomplish this, mirror your target's demeanor and their dress. Other key tactics include arriving early and staying late — when there are fewer people to contend with. Also make sure you get the other person to do most of the talking by preparing interesting questions. Avoid spending the majority of time with people you know; unless they are a target with whom you want to deepen your relationship.

One of the precursors to the "adjust phase" is attending networking events with a tag-team partner. In addition to enabling possible conversations for each other, you can rely on each other for feedback. Then define when and how to change your approach based on your results and the feedback.

Start small and find a partner to celebrate success

Learning to love networking and achieving success can seem overwhelming and will take some time. Be patient with yourself and start with small steps such as creating your elevator pitch, picking one event, trying your approach and recording what you learn.

A mediocre but well-executed plan usually beats out a great but poorly executed plan as long as you follow the 10/80/10 paradigm: plan, do, adjust and repeat. Also be sure to find a networking partner. In addition to getting candid feedback, you can also celebrate your successes.



DOUG PACKARD, CEO and owner of Renaissance Executive Forums in Maine and New Hampshire and Doug Packard Consulting in Portland, can be reached at DPACKARD@DOUGPACKARDCONSULTING.COM

DOUGPACKARDCONSULTING.COM