



Networking 101 – It is not what you know but who you know

By Tashania Morris, ALS, CDF

Networking is more about farming than it is about hunting. It's about cultivating relationships.

– Dr. Ian Misner, BNI

At first glance networking might seem a bit awkward—especially if you are not extroverted. For those who enjoy being the life of the party, this might be second nature. Let's be honest. Walking up to a total stranger and starting a conversation is not always easy. It requires practice—the more you do it, the better you become. It has been said it is not what you know but who you know. Jim Rohn once said, "You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with." Networking gives you a chance to meet people, expand your circle, and, in the process, you might gain a mentor, become a mentor, find a job, offer someone a job, meet a business partner, or find a couple of clients.

It is About Building Relationships

Networking is self-serving—a bunch of people getting together because one wants something from the other. If you have never done it before, it is easy to think that networking is manipulative. The goal is not to attend networking events only when you need something, e.g., a job or clients for the new business you have just started. The goal is to build long-term relationships because most friendships do not happen overnight. I know we live in the age of the microwave but REAL relationships take time to develop. Some people are disappointed if they attend networking events and are not immediately showered with job opportunities and business deals. I once attended a networking event and witnessed how easy it is to fall into this mindset. I felt a bit embarrassed for the person. After overhearing a hiring manager speaking, the person quickly entered the conversation by asking if the hiring manager could help him find a job. The problem is that the two were not even acquainted. The look on the hiring manager's face was priceless and she awkwardly walked away from the conversation. I still chuckle at the memory. Think about networking as a way to meet new and interesting people in order to expand your circle. There will be times that you can offer to help a couple of people you meet along the way and other times they might be able to help you. Do not attend with a taker's mentality because people can sense this a mile away.

Listening and Learning

While attending a networking event, I recently had a conversation with a couple of friends about how awkward it is to walk up to a stranger and introduce yourself. Some people really enjoy talking about themselves. They could go on and on about their many achievements and might not even realize that you have not gotten a word in. For the rest of us who are not as comfortable, we were told that listening is one of the best things you can do while networking.

Listen to what the other person is saying, ask appropriate questions, and be engaged in the conversation. Once the person with whom you are speaking sees that you are genuinely interested in what they have to say then, after a while, it will not feel awkward. I really enjoy meeting people and listening to their stories. It is always interesting to learn about someone's journey. I have learned so much from others I have met along the way and, hopefully, others have learned from me as well.

Elevator Speech

If you are anything like I am, then you might need an elevator speech. My family and close friends chuckle when I tell them I am an introvert. I am not sure why they find it so hard to believe. They think because I am playful, talkative, and always have a smile on my face, I am extroverted. The truth is I am a homebody—my perfect night is walking on the beach listening to the waves or sitting at home eating caramel ice cream and reading a good book or watching a good movie. Pretty boring stuff if you are adventurous. How your elevator speech is crafted depends on your ultimate goal. If you are a college student attending a networking event created specifically for recruiters and job seekers, you will need to state what you are studying, something you are good at, the kinds of positions you are interested in, and what you can offer an organization. You should be able to quickly answer the question, "Tell me about yourself." If you are a business owner, you can quickly sum up what you do and how you can be of assistance without the person on the opposite end feeling like they are a part of a sales meeting.

Types of Networking Events

There are different types of networking events, each created for a different purpose and audience. When attending networking events, be mindful of what you are trying to accomplish and how it fits into your personal and professional lives. This can get a bit pricey so being strategic about your choices will help with time, costs, and the types of relationships you are trying to build. You do not want to waste time attending networking events just to attend if they will not be beneficial to you. There are professional organizations, civic organizations, health, religious, business referral, and networking groups. Understanding your goal will help in choosing which networking events and organizations you want to be affiliated with. I love career development, training and development, and all things HR. I attend a lot of workshops which are normally designed for networking as well. This way I am able to learn and meet new

people at the same time. I attend a couple of free happy hour events because the cost of workshops adds up over time. I also choose beforehand which ones I plan to attend on a monthly basis. Some workshops range from \$25 upwards but most include dinner and dessert. Most of the events I attend are organizations of which I am currently a member. This way I am able to build relationships over time.

Networking events you might look into:

- <https://www.nals.org/?stateschapters>: A local NALS chapter is a great way to meet other members and become actively involved.
- <http://www.networkafterwork.com>: I am planning to attend a couple of these events. The cost is at least \$12 if you purchase your ticket online and \$25 at the door.
- <http://bit.ly/1nJ9uzC>: If you live in south Florida, you can attend the Network Recruiter Networking event. It is free. The events are normally listed on eventbrite.com.
- <http://www.meetup.com>: This is a great way to search for groups you are interested in joining.
- <http://hrinsidetrack.com/>: This is a virtual networking event. It is a great way to meet HR professionals and learn new tricks on how to update your résumé and make your job search more effective. It takes place every Monday night at 6:30 and it is free. You do not have to be in HR to join. I attend most of the meetings.

Networking is about building relationships and being authentic and genuine. It is not about pretending to be someone you are not and collecting a bunch of business cards you will never use. Have a plan, be strategic, and do not be afraid to just step outside of your comfort zone.

Tashania Morris, ALS, CDF, CPC, started her career as a paralegal. She has over six years' experience in the legal field specializing in the areas of foreclosure and bankruptcy. She recently completed her master's degree in Human Resource Management which has equipped her with the tools needed to think strategically and develop creative solutions to problems in the workplace. As a Certified Professional Coach and Career Development Facilitator she loves all things career and personal development. She is able to recognize people's skills and abilities and enjoys working with individuals to figure out their "why." Her mission is to engage, empower, educate, and promote change from within. If you have any questions about any of the articles written, suggestions about something you would like Tashania to write about, or enjoyed reading the article, send her a quick note. You can reach Tashania at Tashania_m@hotmail.com.