

Networking Know How - Make Your Connections Count

By Caterina Rando

Networking is not collecting business cards. Networking is creating a pool of sources from which you can draw clients, resources, referrals and opportunities. This pool of people is called your "sphere of influence."

Weeks after meeting a travel consultant at an event, I received a huge packet of promotional material in the mail. This costly packet was sent without a hello note, no business card and no follow-up call. What a waste of paper, postage and energy! Attractive, innovative marketing materials are far less important than a smile and a handshake.

Success in business is not about products or services, it is about people -- getting to know who they are and what they do. Your success is not solely dependent on your product or service. Your success depends on the width and depth of the people in your sphere of influence.

I attribute my professional success as a business coach and professional speaker to the people that know me, like me and trust me -- the people in my sphere of influence. These people are my friends, my clients, my vendors, members of groups I belong to, and anyone else I have ever met that I maintain contact with. The people in my sphere of influence send me referrals, are a resource for me, my clients, and are the people I call when I have a question. These are the people I know, like and trust.

Successful Steps for Creating and Maintain a Large Sphere of Influence

- Increase the number of people you come into contact with. Go to networking events, join a professional organization or put together a workshop. Set goals for meeting new people each week. Then, create an action list to meet that goal.
- Tell people you are interested in expanding your sphere of influence. Ask what they do to meet people, and if they can introduce you to people you would like to meet.
- Create rapport. Put your attention on the person you are talking to. Make eye contact, smile and give a good handshake. Ask questions about things that interest them, their business, their industry, and their professional affiliations.
- People will remember you when you remember them. Make an effort to learn and remember names and use them in conversation.
- Always get a business card from someone when you meet them. After you leave, note on the card, write where you met them or something about them that will help you remember them when you look at their card later. Also note any action items you agreed to do, i.e., follow-up with them next week or send a brochure.
- After you meet someone you want in your sphere of influence, always send them a handwritten note. The note need not say more than "nice to meet you." Print note cards with your photo on them to insure that people will remember who you are, and your note will make more impact. Don't send someone a solicitation letter.

- Refer people in your sphere of influence to each other. When you put two people together and it goes well, you become a hero.
- Create a contact schedule. How often are you going to contact everyone in your sphere of influence - monthly, quarterly, semiannually ? How are you going to contact them ? - by phone, with a note, by sending a newsletter?
- Consider holding an annual event for your sphere of influence. You could partner with a friend in a complimentary business and double your sphere of influence in one night.
- When people refer business to you, thank them at least 3 times - with a phone call, with a note, and by thanking them in person, in public, in front of other people. Everybody appreciates recognition!
- Do not focus on getting business immediately. Focus on creating a solid relationship with people so they know you, like you and trust you. Eventually, they will refer business to you or become a regular customer.
- Create a system for keeping track of people either record information that is important to them - their spouse's name, their professional affiliations, any awards they have won, etc.
- When you want to know someone better invite them to events that you know would be of interest to them. This is a simple, easy way to build a relationship with someone.

People buy from you when they know you, like you and trust you. Business is not about what you do or how you do it. Business is about relationships, about helping others overcome their challenges and meet their objectives, about finding out what needs to be done and doing it. Provide people with support and you will build a large sphere of influence that supports your business.

Caterina Rando, MA, MCC, is author of "Learn to Power Think," a keynote speaker, success coach and trainer. She helps people invigorate their professional and personal lives and create the results they want. To find out about her book and other resources, visit <http://www.caterinar.com>. Caterina can be reached at 415-668-4535 or by email at cpr@caterinar.com.