

Get out and meet some new people

Even in these days of inbound marketing and global online exposure, many people still find a professional service provider by asking for a recommendation from someone they trust. As a result, it's still quite valuable to build a network of people who know you or have met you face-to-face. That means that regularly meeting new people is a very good idea.

To enjoy and succeed at meeting people, don't focus on developing business but instead focus on:

1. Trying to get to know them. What's on their mind? What interests them, and why? Be non-judgmental and non-evaluative; you are having a social encounter. Business implications and ideas should not be part of the discussion unless it is clearly appropriate to bring them forward.
2. Trying to discover a reason to get to know them better or to stay in touch with them. You will rarely forge a memorable connection at a brief event. But with many people you meet, creating a memorable connection is a worthwhile investment — if only because you have no idea at the start who they know. To create the memorable connection usually requires arranging to spend some more time with them. You need to find a reason for or way to have that second conversation. One approach to get them interested in a second conversation is to offer to help them, e.g., introduce them to someone you know, talk to them for a few minutes by phone in more detail about a situation they are facing.

It is critical to follow up quickly. If you don't follow up within a day or two, you signal your lack of interest in continuing the conversation; in addition, as each day passes the probability you will ever call decreases. To follow up, you need to obtain contact information from them. That might be from their business card. For younger people (who are less likely to have a business card), it's more likely to be a phone number you can text to or a website address. Or they'll want to exchange contact information using their phone with an application like Bump.

When thinking about meeting people, start with easy venues and gain experience and confidence. Then move to more difficult settings. Easier settings include:

- Meetups through www.meetup.com. These events are organized around shared interests and are very low stress. Often the groups have members introduce themselves at the start. Meetups are great places to practice meeting people. Most of the mingling happens at the

beginning or the end (with a program and discussion in the middle), and you can always just ask, "What do you do when you are not at meetups like this?" to get started during the mingling.

- Alumni events, especially if you went to a college with an active alumni group in your location. Events usually center on a topic. Discussion is easy since you have the discussion topic and the school in common (unless non-alumni are crashing the event — which happens a fair bit and opens different doors for discussion). You can also often attend alumni events of other universities if you are interested in the topic they are discussing.
- Social events, such as weddings, parties you attend, or your kid's soccer games. Trying to get to know people with your business in the back of your mind is not being mercenary, but simply bringing your whole self to events you attend. You might discover that the dad or mom on the soccer team is a good person to know for other reasons too.

Industry events or official networking events are more challenging. It is more difficult in these settings to put aside your desire to make it "pay off"; as a result, it is hard to feel you can just talk to someone and start a connection. Industry and structured networking events are good to try once you are comfortable with talking with and connecting with other people.

Something to do this week

Get out and get started:

- Join or visit www.meetup.com. See what groups exist near you related to topics you care about. Join one and sign up for an event (and then go!).
- If you are not a member of your college alumni organization, find out whether there is a chapter in your city. If there is, check out their programming. Join and attend!

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