

PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING 101

“DEVELOPING THE KNOWN NETWORK”©

By Rod Colon

A colleague in a meeting several weeks ago challenged me.

“Rod, you can not teach networking. You either are born with the gift to Network or you are not.”

I disagree

Everyone networks; it is when you put undue pressure on yourself that it becomes a challenge because you lose focus on the goal and the philosophy. If you watch kids from the ages of 3 to 5 years old in a playground, they have no fear of networking with their playmates. Once we are in school we are programmed to behave in a certain manner, and then FEAR enters.

Develop and enjoy your network – it is all in the philosophy!

Developing and Leveraging Your Network

"Networking" is a common professional buzzword that describes the most effective tool in leveraging business contacts. But what exactly is Networking? Networking is the process of developing and nurturing relationships with people. By building these relationships, you create a venue for gathering and exchanging information that can help you and your networking contacts meet personal and professional goals. Why is networking so successful? It is more personal than any other strategy. Networking allows you to get to know people and make face-to-face contact. As people get to know one another, they become comfortable sharing information. Through these relationships, you will learn about business and job opportunities that you would never have accessed otherwise. The power of referrals is now in play.

Building a Network

Perhaps you are thinking, "This sounds great, but how do I get started?" Believe it or not, you already have. You already have an existing network of people you know (warm contacts). Talking with these warm contacts is the best way to start developing your network. As you discuss your goals, plans, and questions with these people, they will refer you to people they know (referral contacts). Referral contacts will often refer you to still more people. The result: an ever-widening network of contacts assisting you with your career. In addition to warm contacts and referral contacts, networking involves talking to people you do not know (cold contacts). Fortunately, you can build a substantial portion of your network with warm contacts

and referrals. However, actively attempting to meet new people may also introduce you to valuable information.

Developing a Network List

To get started it will help to generate a networking list. Start by making a list of people you know. Think broadly, since this is simply brainstorming. List every possibility you can think of; it might be helpful to think in terms of categories such as:

<i>Friends</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>Employers, past and present</i>
<i>Roommates</i>	<i>Co-workers, past and present</i>	<i>Alumni Directory</i>
<i>Teachers/Professors</i>	<i>Associations</i>	<i>Place of worship</i>

These are just a few of the many options to reach out too.

[If you are struggling to build your list, start with your resume, use it to think of everyone you remember. If after all this, you still have less than 200 names – call me and I will help jog your memory]

Principle of Reciprocity

RECIPROCAL, n. 1. A reciprocal state or relation.

Understand this principle. Everyone has wants, needs, and desires. If you are able to help/assist your networking associate reach or come closer to their goals, you are developing an implied reciprocal arrangement. Then, quality networking and a true exchange of information will become second nature.

When you are willing to extend yourself and willing to assist, most people are compelled to assist you in reaching your goals.

Only “Drive-By” pseudo networking associates will NOT reciprocate. When you identify a leech in the system, simply remove them from your list, and remember for the future.

The Philosophy of Making the Call

This is where rubber meets the road. Most professionals will agree with this point, but when it comes time to pick up the telephone it becomes a 10-Ton Elephant!

What makes calling a network contact so difficult is that you do not want to sound like a phone solicitor begging for a sale. The key to the phone call is your PHILOSOPHY for the call. Many

people who begin this process in a “sales” mode immediately fail because they tell the contact what they want, getting it off their chest. This method is not productive.

The philosophy to every call is simply to reconnect and exchange information. It is a **networking** call, not a **sales** call. If you start to feel your heart racing and the phone begins to feel heavy, you are approaching the call as a SALES call. **STOP!** Make the call but remember the goal of the call is to simply reconnect and exchange information.

[If you are struggling with this area – call me and I will get you through it]

Phone Call Scenario #1 the Wrong Way!

[Background: I am calling a friend who I worked with for 5 years but have not spoken to them in over 6 years and now found their contact information]

Rod: Hi Bill, this is Rod Colon we worked together at Mango Tango company several years ago. How are you?

Bill: Rod – wow, long time no hear. How are you and the family?

Rod: Bill the family is good and I am not doing well. I am looking for work and need your help.

Bill: Sorry to hear that but my company is not hiring, send me your resume and I will see what I can do.

Observation

1. Waste of a potential great opportunity
2. How would you feel if someone who you have not spoken to in 6 years calls you only for a job – they wanted to know so more about you
3. You have no idea what they are doing
4. You have no reconnecting point to follow up on
5. Your resume will be put to the side and limited action will be taken by you friend
6. The friend feels a bit used

Phone Call Scenario #2 the Better Way!

[Background: I am calling a friend who I worked with for 5 years but have not spoken to them in over 6 years and now found their contact information]

Rod: Hi Bill, this is Rod Colon we worked together at Mango Tango company several years ago. How are you?

Bill: Rod – wow, long time no hear. How are you and the family?

Rod: The family is great and I am doing well. Is this a good time to talk?

Bill: Sure, what is going on?

Rod: I have realized over the years that it is critical to network and keep connected. I wanted to make sure you had my contact information and see how things are going for you

Bill: Sounds like a plan (90% of the time your network associate will agree that networking and staying connected is critical)

Rod: I am networking with 100s of professionals and wanted to make sure you are tapped into my network. Bill how are you doing? (This is the critical question to the call – and super important that you LISTEN – 50% will answer positively and 50% will answer negatively)

Bill: (Negative Response)

Rod: (Listen intently) Bill, I am sorry to hear about your situation. Through my network, we have access to many openings. Why do not you e-mail me your resume and I will do what I can to connect you to the right people.

Reasons for asking for their resume

- ◆ It is very difficult for a professional to be willing to give information about their organization when they are not satisfied with their present situation. It is easier to assist them and continue to dialogue with them through future networking conversations. It is important you do everything you can to assist them with their search within your network
- ◆ The resume will assist you in knowing more about your colleague and potential connecting points with other members in your network

Bill: (Positive Response)

Rod: Bill that's great thing are going well for you. What are you so excited about? (Listen intently and record as much of the information as possible and use it for future conversations)

- ◆ If you know someone who would help them in their current professional/business connect them to Bill
- ◆ If they are excited about their business career, it is very likely there are business and job opportunities you should inquire on for yourself and other networking associates
- ◆ Connect Bill with other individuals in the same line of work to assist them to networking as well.

- ◆ Suggest that you meet face to face with the person to seek their help and advice in conducting business
- ◆ Provide fellow network contact with a copy of your resume so they can learn more about your background and experiences (not with the intention of applying for a job)
- ◆ Be open to advice and information
- ◆ Ask for referrals
- ◆ Let your level of rapport guide your requests for more specific information

Recording and Following Up

You are not done yet. Maintaining a connection with your fellow network contact is half of the networking process. By nurturing these relationships and staying in touch, you will have the opportunity to share more information with one another.

You must develop a system of recording your information and acting upon it. Project manage your network and implement the same methodologies used as a Project Manager. Keep track of your fellow network contact. Create a system to record your Network, what you learned, special information about them, and to whom you have been referred. *[If you are not sure how to do this, give me a call]*

- Send a thank you note.
- Follow up with referrals as soon as possible.
- Keep in touch with your fellow network contact to let them know how things are going and how they have been helpful.
- You are building a relationship. Look for opportunities and reasons to stay in touch. Be willing to assist them with their goals as well.

Building a network takes time, persistent effort, and sincerity in developing relationships with others. As you continue, you gather information through networking; you are likely to come across leads and ideas to enhance your career. Keep in mind that the people you contact now, may come back to you for assistance.

[I recommend you reach out to your fellow network contact at least 3 x per year]

Networking Tips

- Networking is not sales and sales is not networking
- Networking is a tool, an extremely valuable one that very successful people rely on
- Networking requires a sincere desire to help others
- If you're only in it for the money, or for yourself, ultimately it won't work
- Invest in helping others
- Networking is not just about you, it's about the group, the network

I have been networking for 24 years and understand its leveraging opportunities. If you have any questions do not hesitate to contact me for further details.

This is simply a very high-level understanding of Networking, hence the title Professional Networking 101 - there is so much more to understand and implement. If you are interested in advanced Networking techniques, contact me.

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