



Ivan Misner: Networking



## Practice Makes Perfect Networking

Implement these 2 simple strategies and watch the referrals pour in.  
By Ivan Misner | April 16, 2008

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These are the two things you should know about networking:

### 1. "Practice makes perfect" is not enough.

Practice alone is not enough. It must be "effective" practice. In martial arts, the *sensei* (master) says, "*Perfect practice makes perfect.*" In other words, if you're just going through the motions, you are *not* learning and growing. Every time you do a *kata* (a system of basic body positioning and movement exercises in karate), you must do it as though you were in a tournament, or as though the *sensei* were there watching you. Only with that intensity of focus does one improve.

The same applies to your networking efforts. If you are applying the techniques halfheartedly, you'll get less-than-acceptable results.

Practicing the skills necessary to become a good networker is important. But would-be networkers cannot expect to become master networkers by just going through the motions. Take, for instance, the 60-second presentation or brief commercial you make every week when you attend many types of networking groups or various other organizations. Most people come to the meeting unprepared and unrehearsed, with only a vague idea of what they will talk about. While others give their presentations, instead of listening, they're thinking about how to say what they need to say. When their turn comes, they stumble through an amateurish, marginal presentation. Yes, they practiced, but it was far from perfect practice, and the results prove it.

If you're a teacher, do you wing your lesson plan? The better teachers set goals and objectives for what they want their students to learn. They spend time planning exactly what they are going to cover in class, sometimes down to the exact wording, and they prepare visual aids and handouts that reinforce the subject matter and facilitate learning.

As a businessperson, you should have similar goals and objectives. Ask yourself what, exactly, do you want your listeners to learn about your business that they can pass along to prospects for a possible referral. If you're vague and unprepared, your potential referral partners are going to leave the meeting without a clear idea of how to refer you.

You also need to practice delivering your message. Winging it is not going to get you what you want. You have to practice it perfectly if your goal is perfection.

### 2. Good networkers should talk about more than just business.

A referral relationship is much more than just, "I do business, you do business, let's do business." A better approach is to find common ground on a personal level, then relate your business to it.

The longer I've been involved in networking, the more I've seen the power of personal interests in making connections. Networking is about building personal relationships. If you remove the personal from the equation, you limit the amount of business that can happen. In one networking group I worked with, I introduced an exercise I call the GAINS Exchange, in which people share personal and professional information about themselves (including their Goals, Accomplishments, Interests, Networks, and Skills).

Two of the participants in this group had known each other for more than a year but had never done business. During the exercise, they discovered they both coached their sons' soccer teams. They quickly became close friends and were soon helping each other conduct soccer practices. After a few months, they began referring business to each other--two guys who had barely spoken to each other the first year because they seemed to have so little in common were now doing business because of a personal connection.

Here's another example of the power of common interests. One of BNI's most instinctive, natural networkers and an avid sailboater, whom we shall call "Bob," found himself sitting in an airport shuttle, very casually dressed, next to a man wearing a shirt with a Nautica label. "Do you sail?" he asked. "Yeah, a little bit," said the man. "Why?"

Bob started talking about his own sailing experiences. It turned out he had won a national championship sailing in the harbor where this man lived. They got into a lively conversation about sailing, the man's hometown, and other common interests and experiences.

After a half hour or so, the man asked, "So, are you a professional sailor?" Bob said, "No, I'm in the training business, but it's a lot like sailing, and here's why." They talked a bit about that, with Bob using sailing as a metaphor for much of what he did. The man expressed an interest in hearing more about it on a professional level. At the airport, the two men exchanged cards and went their separate ways.

If Bob had started the conversation by saying, "I'm a professional trainer," that probably would have been the end of it. Instead, by finding a common interest and starting with that, Bob made a connection that had a good chance of turning into business.

Perfect practice makes perfect, and personal connections lead to business. Entrepreneurs who implement these two strategies into their networking efforts get a lot more business than their competition.

