



Ivan Misner: Networking

Why Introverts Can Be Great Networkers

You don't have to be a people person to network; you just have to be willing to listen.
By Ivan Misner | May 23, 2007

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A common assumption is that a "people person" is the best type of networker. But this isn't necessarily true. Actually, the only people who can't profit from networking or referral marketing are those who don't like people at all. But they aren't likely to be entrepreneurs or involved in sales in the first place.

Most entrepreneurs who depend directly on others buying their products or services have at least a certain comfort level in dealing with people. Even if you're not outgoing or gregarious, you can form meaningful relationships and communicate your ideas. A lot of people are like that, and if you are, referral marketing is still one of the best ways to build your business.

Often, introverts eliminate themselves from networking because they aren't good at initializing conversations. That's unfortunate, because they're actually better at the part of networking that's more important to the relationship-building process.

Networking is a two-part process. First, you have to meet someone new and share information about yourself. The extrovert may be better at this first part of the process. But the introvert is better at the second part--listening to the person he or she just met. The type of networking I recommend can actually be easier for an introvert because extroverts love talking about themselves, while introverts are better at listening and asking questions.

A good networker has two ears and one mouth and uses each proportionally. A good networker asks questions and gets to know the other person. And once you know the other person, it's much easier to solve one of their problems or ease one of their concerns.

So if you're introverted, stop using that as an excuse not to network. If you're still feeling daunted, there are many techniques you can use to make the process easier. For example, if you feel uncomfortable walking up to total strangers at a chamber business mixer, volunteer to be an ambassador for that group. In this role, you are, in effect, a host for the chamber, which makes it easier and more natural for you to greet people and say, "Welcome to our event. My name is [Ivan Misner]. I'm an ambassador for the chamber." Before you know it, the ice is broken, and you're engaged in conversation.

Many opportunities to learn the art of networking abound, and often in places you may not have considered. Do you do volunteer work? Volunteering offers a great opportunity for meeting new people, many of whom could be future clients. Other people have become great networkers by joining their children's PTA, coaching in a sports league, working on a fundraiser, or even coordinating or speaking at a political event for a local or national candidate.

Networking is a skill that can be learned--no matter your level of gregariousness. If you remain ill-at-ease in environments where you have to mix and mingle or meet new people, take advantage of training seminars and workshops that teach you how to network effectively. You'll find that when you learn ways to handle these situations, you'll become more relaxed and confident in a networking setting.

