Avoid Networking Mistakes

Business networking is a very important business activity and skill, especially when business people find connections with one another which produce a “win-win” situation. For example, last week I had the opportunity to visit with several local small business owners where this topic was discussed and Brian Keehn, Operations Manager for K&S said that a major part of their business comes from people with whom they have done business who recommend business to them. People feel most comfortable doing business with people whom they know or with people who are referred by someone they know and trust. He said that for their business “this is true of major contractors with whom they work as well as individual home owners for whom they are providing heating, air conditioning, plumbing or electrical service”.

So if this is such an important skill/activity, what are some key items to know about to be successful. One of the most common networking settings is at a meeting. My observation is that attendees often make mistakes that prevent them from capitalizing on new opportunities. Last week I mentioned Susan Fronk, Twin Cities Chapter President of MainStreetChamber. She would put it this way, you want to avoid becoming "that guy" or "that girl" after the event. Here are some suggestions:

1. **Showing up without a plan.** If you don't have a plan, you can't measure whether or not the time you invested was worthwhile. Set specific goals for contacts, information and resources you want to find and you will know exactly how successful the event was.

2. **Talking too much about your company and/or products and services.** The best way to make a good first impression is to make others feel important. You can do this by asking questions about others and then demonstrating a genuine interest in their answers.

3. **Selling instead of offering something of value** According to Jeffrey Gitomer, award winning author and expert on sales, "People don't like to be sold but they love to buy". And, they prefer buying from people they like and trust. We all like and trust people who consistently deliver something of value to us.

4. **Self-serving.** People who attend networking events with the mindset of "what's in it for me" risk being perceived as "self-serving" and superficial. In contrast, people who attend networking events with a genuine interest in discovering the unique talents and experiences of others tend to be perceived as valuable contacts.

5. **Not keeping the commitments you make.** Make sure you follow through with what you tell people you are going to do. This is a matter of integrity.

6. **Pestering contacts following an event.** Nothing stunts the growth of budding relationship faster than badgering people.

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