



# UNIT 1

## Assessing Your Networking Skills

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Introduce yourself in a meaningful, memorable way, even if you've never worked on an elevator pitch before



## Unit 1

### Assessing Your Networking Skills

#### Networking Dynamics

Don't let yourself think that networking is just about making connections and building your relationships, because while that may be how we do it, it's not the honest reason for why we do it. Business networking is a strategy used in sales and marketing to extend our reach and obtain referrals, introductions, and ultimately, sell our products and services.

A solid business network, whether it is of 50 businesses that you can do business with, or 200 or 1000, is your path to getting your goods and services to market. The physical and relationship nature of networking allows you to reach decisions makers more effectively and with deeper relationships than more traditional kinds of advertising. It also includes the advantage of personal introductions, referrals, and recommendations, which make the development of those business opportunities even stronger.

Business networking uses the same principles that you find throughout sales, management, coaching, and facilitating techniques. They are heavily dosed in common sense and require a commitment to relationship building.

#### Are You Committed?

##### Self-Assessment

You wouldn't be here in this workshop if you weren't committed to getting better at networking. Everyone is here to learn something to help them get ahead.

The list below includes 10 principles for networking success. Rate yourself on each point, using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "not as effective as I could be" and 5 is "more effective than anyone else I know."

Statement	Rating
I have a quick, efficient, compelling elevator speech (your 15-30 second introduction).	
I differentiate myself from my competition.	
I am committed to serving/helping others.	



I operate with high integrity.	
I am targeting my ideal client.	
I attend networking events with a goal in mind.	
I do my follow up on time every time.	
I have a positive demeanor at all times.	
I am focused, ready, and diligent.	
I have a high degree of product knowledge and confidence in what I am selling.	

## Identifying Opportunities and Customizing Your Approach

### Creating Opportunities

#### Differentiating Yourself

If there is no real difference between you and the competition, people have no reason to work with you and will go off in search of someone else. It really is that simple. In order to get people interested in you and what you have to offer, you've got to appeal to them by being somehow a little different than your competitors, and to stand out. This is your opportunity to differentiate.

Whether you offer something of added value, you do it in a different way, deliver it with more aplomb, or whatever it happens to be, if there is no real difference between what you and a competitor offers, you will have to find a way to create something. Doing so is part of what will allow you to connect to people when you are networking. Conducting a little research ahead of time also means that you are able to pre-qualify prospects you will meet at a networking event, and to come up with something that might appeal to them.

#### Preparing to Network

When you are preparing for a networking event, try to scope out who will be there. If it's only people you know already, think of it as a social event instead of networking. Don't go where all your friends are if you want to meet new people. Target places where you can meet people, connect with them, and learn about them. You should keep in mind that you are not selling to people at a networking event; you are meeting and connecting with them. Your purpose is not necessarily to meet your target market at a networking event (save that for the trade shows).

When you are able to clearly articulate what you do, and what your differentiation is, and you can do so



confidently, and you can demonstrate your integrity and ability, the members of your network will either want to do business with you or refer you to people they know.

Don't aimlessly attend every networking meeting or join every association that you come across. Try to find networks that already exist and are functioning effectively or have strong potential.

## Key Questions

Here are some key things to ask about networks that you are exploring.

- Do members already refer one another?
- Do they meet regularly?
- Do people commit to doing follow up?
- Does the group offer relevance to the members or visitors?
- Do they operate with a high degree of integrity?

Keep in mind that in order to fit in, you need to be able to help them to succeed as well as having them help you.

## Things to Consider

When you are planning to network, things to consider include:

- Geography: Are you local, regional, or global? What is the focus of that particular network?
- Size: Can you meet enough people over time?
- Industry/Sector: If you are selling paper, you need people who know people who will use paper.
- Demographics: Are things like age, ethnicity, gender, and seniority reflective of your target market?
- Political or religious affiliations
- Academic or career affiliations
- Additional areas of common interest: Consider the shopping local movement, slow food, technology, fair trade, environmental, etc.

## Customizing Your Approach

You have to plan your networking so that you can manage it. The first thing to do is realize that business networking is part of your marketing strategy, which means that all activities come from your marketing budget. Marketing benefits from directed, focused activity, which exists to:

- Create awareness about what you have to offer
- Build relationships so that, ultimately, sales are made

While you are at a networking event – and even in line for coffee – it is of great importance that you can answer very direct questions about what you do. You will be asked by potential clients and referral sources, so you need to be ready to deliver a clear, concise answer that supports you being a credible resource, and someone either



they or their friend might want to do business with.

Set up some targets and measures for networking, and then monitor your results. Since business networking can also be a lot of fun, make sure you keep your desired results and cost-effectiveness in mind. If you are spending half your marketing budget (no matter what size it is) on networking and have no results, then you have just misspent half of your marketing budget.

You also need to be open to unplanned networking opportunities, which can come up at any time. Everyone out there has a life just like you do, and they travel, shop, and get in lineups, just like you do. You will be able to make the most of these unplanned situations if you are open to them, you make eye contact and say hello to people, take initiative and start conversations, appear friendly and approachable.

To capitalize on unplanned networking, make sure you always have a pen (or a phone where you can record a note) and business cards with you.

Although this will surprise some people, the best way for you to network is NOT to give out as many business cards or brochures as possible. Being purposeful about networking means that you do NOT recite your sales pitch to everyone you meet, nor do you ask a stranger to give you their business. Instead, being purposeful means that you build relationships, you work to become a helpful contributor to the group, and then allow the introductions and referrals to come to you.

### How can you contribute to a networking group?

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#### Further Reading:

- ✓ Burg, Bob. *Endless Referrals: Network Your Everyday Contacts Into Sales (3rd Edition)*. McGraw-Hill, 2005.
- ✓ —. *The Go Giver: A Little Story About a Powerful Business Idea*. Portfolio Hardcover, 2007.