

How to Love Networking

BY GAIL SUSSMAN MILLER

On a scale of 1-10, how much do you love networking? Yes, love! A ranking of 1 means you'd rather clean your cluttered office. A 10 means you love connecting with people everywhere, whether in the store checkout line or in an elevator or sitting in your dentist's chair. Write your ranking in the margin, then read on to find out how to become someone who views networking as an easy, natural extension of who you are and what you like to do.

The power of networking. Evidence shows that networking is becoming the No. 1 way to accomplish goals. Networking is typically the best way to market a business, find clients, find a job or make friends. It's a great way to reduce research and "cold-calling" and can lead to door-opening introductions, new ideas, collaborations and unexpected opportunities.

What are your challenges to networking?

Perception and unwritten rules contribute to creating uncomfortable obstacles to this powerful activity. Some worry about how to start conversations, what to say, if they are interesting enough and fear rejection. Many believe they have to be an extrovert to succeed, must impose on others or give a forced sales pitch. Makes cleaning that cluttered office look more appealing, right?

Let the reframing begin! Let's start by redefining your characterization of networking. Try my definition: "Networking is connecting with like-minded people for the greater good." It's making new acquaintances and going deeper with existing relationships for the sake of a common objective. Now stop reading a moment. Do you feel a shift in your attitude about networking with this definition? Think about your motivation to network. What information, resources or help might you need to make an improvement in some area of your life? What if connecting with other people helped you get there sooner? And what if it was easy?



10 obstacle-busting tips. Here are some tips and philosophies to help start your transformation. Notice the guidelines that fit for you and incorporate them into your next encounter.

1. Make an assumption that everyone is special. Be curious and make it your goal at a networking event to find out one unique thing about each person you meet.
2. Some people fear they won't be interesting enough. To be interesting, be genuinely interested in others. They will appreciate your attention and will be drawn to you.
3. Be generous and other-oriented. Listen and ask to determine people's needs and see how you can be a resource or connector. Give first vs. being out to "get" something, without expecting anything in return.
4. Keep in mind a mental shopping list of *all* the things you need in your life. Perhaps you need a new plumber, a recommendation on a computer, a new client, ideas for a great vacation spot. See everyone you meet as an opportunity to learn.
5. Start conversations comfortably in two

easy steps. 1) Say hello. 2) Find out what you have in common. To start, you are both human beings at the same point and time on the planet! "Are you attending this business group for the first time?" "Do you know the bride or the groom at this wedding?"

6. Be prepared to ask powerful questions that move past small talk, one of the things people often dislike about networking. Ask, "What is most important to you?" about a topic you are discussing. Imagine how authentic you will feel and how memorable you will be if you ask, "What is your greatest satisfaction in your work?"
7. Be unattached to the outcome, which removes pressure. Define your own idea of success at a networking event and make it fun and easy. Examples: Say hello to at least three people, have one meaningful conversation, ask one person for something you need.
8. Rename "networking" and toss out that term and all your old limiting beliefs and rules. Call it "connecting" or a more meaningful word that fits you.
9. Here's a shocker: You don't have to attend another networking event ever again! This is great news if you are shy or introverted or just don't like large gatherings. Create your own "event" every time you meet people.
10. Think about where you meet people the most comfortably in your life. At church or synagogue? At a party? Playing sports? Carry that mindset and approach everywhere. When it comes down to it, you meet people one-to-one even in a room of 1,000.

Time to reassess your 1-10 ranking!

Armed with a new definition, new rules and approaches, on our scale of 1-10, how much do you *love* networking now? Notice the change in your score and celebrate your accomplishment. Now, take it on the road. 📌

Gail Sussman Miller may be reached at gail@inspiredchoice.com or (773) 477-4012.