

## Rethink Networking

BY TIM KLABUNDE

**S**ome of my most successful days networking, I spend sitting at my desk. I don't attend a single association event, no lunches, and definitely not any speed-networking events. To succeed at networking, I work my computer and make phone calls with the sole purpose of helping other people. I make introductions, forward project leads, pass along information from a local paper, and laugh with friends about my two sons' most recent escapades.

If you ask most people what networking is, you will often get the traditional answer about leveraging relationships to get work. The problem is that this definition seems to indicate that networking is about you, while successful networking isn't about you, it is about helping others.

*“Successful networking isn't about you, it is about helping others.”*

### Rethink Your Networking Approach

I often use John as an example when speaking on networking because of his success in motivating me to do everything in my power to help him. John's strategy was simple: He always provided me with leads, regularly sent me pertinent information, and was always opening new doors for me by introducing me to other people. Because he was working so hard for me, I wanted to work just as hard for him. The moment I would get a new lead, I would be on the phone with John desperately trying to reciprocate his unending help.

Now imagine that you were John and you were taking this same approach with just 10 key relationships. Your network would be providing you with more leads and opportunities than you would be able to handle. What a far cry from the stacks of business cards that some business development professionals bring back to the office as a sort of trophy to show their success and to validate their salary. John knew that real success was found in just helping others.

### Rethink Networking Events

To succeed at networking, we need to embrace association events, trade shows, lunches, etc. as the tools that infuse new relationships into our network, not as the sole point of networking. They are the place where we first learn enough about someone and their business to know how we can help them, and they provide us the opportunity to walk away with some way to follow up, that is, some way that we can help them.

### Rethink Follow-up

True networking is the relationship building that regularly happens in-between the events we have incorrectly assumed to be the center of networking. Everyone says follow-up is key, yet so few actually do it! Think of the last 10 times you traded business cards with someone. Of those 10 times, how many people did you follow up with and how many just ended up in the stack of business cards on your desk?

### Ask Yourself, “How Can I Help This Person?”

The next time you head out to network, remember what you are really there to do. It is time to rethink how you perceive networking. No more collecting business cards, giving a sales pitch on your company, or thinking about who in the room can get you the next job. Instead, start by focusing on building meaningful relationships with others. When you walk up to someone, think to yourself, “How can I help this person?” When you learn how to focus on helping others first, the real networking begins.

### About the Author



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