



“Getting Out of the Activity Trap”

The “Art” of Networking

Networking is defined as “building professional, mutually serving relationships for the purpose of helping both parties obtain goals.” Some people appear to be natural “networkers,” others are not as comfortable but can learn the skills and improve with practice.

Networking can sometimes be viewed negatively, as phony and superficial. This occurs when the proper steps to successful networking are not followed and the person may feel “used” or the interaction “insincere.” Promoting your needs prematurely or in the wrong situation can be viewed negatively. I have heard activity professionals say “I sometimes feel bad, I’m always on the lookout for what someone can provide.” The key to successful partnerships is the development of reciprocal relationships: both parties are helped by the interaction.

Consider each of the following points as you assess your networking skills (consistently or sometimes)

1. Are you energized when you talk with others about the work you do?
2. Do you connect and introduce your contacts to each other?
3. Do you seek out new people in unfamiliar settings?
4. Do you enjoy “working the room” and meeting lots of people?
5. Are you sincerely interested in the work that others do?
6. When meeting new people does your body language convey confidence?
7. Do you look for ways that you or your facility and residents can benefit others?
8. Are you a genuine conversationalist who can talk with others easily?
9. Do you use active listening skills and encourage others to talk?
10. Do you keep up with others after they have provided a service?

Did you evaluate yourself consistently “high” in each of the 10 areas, or did you identify skills that can be improved? Did you find some skills that you rated “sometimes?” If so, give some thought to the situation and how you might improve.

The following suggestions will serve as a guide to help you develop your networking plan.

- Make a list of 3 organizations that you would like to join. These can be groups that share a common bond or interest with you, service organizations or a group that you would like to support.
- Develop a list of people that you would like to get to know better. This list includes other staff members, professional colleagues, business owners, neighbors or acquaintances in the community.
- Develop the relationships before you need a resource or service. Networking is not a one way communication. It takes time to build trust.
- Commit a specified amount of time to these “extracurricular” activities. Be realistic in your goal, tell someone else about your plan and stick to these events.
- Attend community events and seek out new contacts. Go into each group or meeting with the goal of meeting and sharing ideas with at least 3 people that you do not already know. Sit at a table with people you do not know. Introduce yourself first.
- Listen with a genuine attitude and understand the other person’s needs. This is perhaps the most important. Networking is about how you can connect in a helpful way with others.



- Make a positive first impression. It is estimated that someone will form an impression of you within the first 30 seconds of the encounter. Much of the impression is formed by the body language that you use, the tone of your voice and your posture. To express confidence it is important to stand “up” not hunched or bending forward, make eye contact (or consider the cultural differences), smile, talk in a low to medium tone and not too fast.
- Think of yourself as a “connector,” a person that brings others together for mutually satisfying goals. Use your contacts to bring others together. This is the sign of a good networker.
- Follow up with new contacts immediately. It is not necessary to be overbearing, this is sometimes seen as “pushy.” Follow up with a short note (email or hand written) to convey interest in the discussion and open the door to more conversations.

Case Studies

Practice Exercises: Networking

“Luck is where the crossroads of opportunity and preparation meet.” (Seneca)

“Luck is when preparation and opportunity collide.”

- Can we become more “lucky”?
- Do people influence their luck by the decisions they make?
- Are some people just in the right place at the right time?
- Did they just get a lucky break?

Psychologist Richard Wiseman reports that you can learn to be a luckier person by changing the way you think. In his studies he found that unlucky people are more anxious, and focus on small details of the situation. Luckier individuals are more laid-back and are open to opportunities when they occur. Lucky people prepare and seek opportunities that will enhance their goals. Unlucky people are passive and hope something good will happen.

Preparing for luck is an active process. It consists of several steps.

1. Understand your goals for the future: personal and professional.

Strategic thinkers see the big picture and envision what will be. They talk about the future with others and keep up with industry trends and changes. They have a vision for their future or the future of the organization or activity department. They have a sense of direction. They envision themselves as they want to be in the future.

2. Create and notice opportunities.

Take action and be prepared to seize the opportunity. Say “yes” to new or risky responsibilities. Move out of your comfort zone and usual patterns and routines. Create opportunities yourself to utilize your strengths. Share your interests and talents with others.

3. Develop a strategy and position yourself: be in the right place at the right time. Implement a plan that details HOW you will move in the right direction to accomplish your goals. Identify

people, groups, knowledge, skills and resources that you will need. Identify specific, small steps that will continually prepare you for opportunity when it comes.

4. Make decisions that will move you closer to your goal.

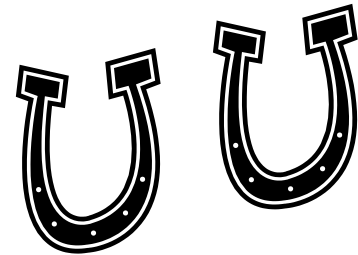
Listen to your intuition. Examine the impact of every decision on the future.

5. Demonstrate a positive attitude and practice resilience.

When something goes wrong it is not “bad luck,” look at it as an opportunity to go in another direction. Resilience is the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties. Lucky people “feel” lucky.

Evaluate your “luckiness.” Do you complain of “bad luck” or that others are always “lucky”? Make a list of how many “lucky” things happen to you. Reflect on these incidents and note what positive steps or preparation you did prior to the lucky happening.

Prepare your luckiness plan-take note of opportunities.



State one career goal

- 1.

State 2 learning goals to help build expert power

- 1.
- 2.

Make a list of 3 organizations that you would like to join

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Develop a list of people that you would like to get to know better

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

List 2 professional events that you will be attending in the next 3 months.

- 1.
- 2.

List a workshop session that you would like to present and the title of an article you would like to write

- 1.
- 2.