

## WHAT IS NETWORKING?

**network / n twerk** *n. & v.* a group of people who exchange information, contacts, and experience for professional or social purposes. (The Oxford Dictionary)

Ask ten different people what networking is and you may get as many as ten different answers. A person's definition of networking probably depends upon their use of this important personal and professional activity. However, whether you network to make new friends, find a new job, develop your current career, explore new career options, obtain referrals or sales leads, or simply to broaden your professional horizons, it is important to focus on networking as an exchange of information, contacts or experience.

In any industry or career level networking helps you make connections in a personal way and build relationships of support and respect to discover and create mutual benefits. It is a skill set no serious professional woman of the 21st Century can be without.

## NETWORKING "HOW TO'S"

- Start with a purpose. It does you no good to attend any networking function unless you define your objectives to know why you are there.
- The name tag is worn on the **right** side to provide an easy sight-line to your name when shaking hands.
- Have an effective handshake. This may appear obvious, but you have probably been on the receiving end of at least one "bone-crusher" and one "limp fish." Practice your handshake to avoid giving one of those yourself!
- Be sure to introduce yourself!
  1. Say your name clearly. "Hello, my name is Juanita Curtiz. It's a pleasure to meet you."
  2. Shake hands.
  3. Use an "elevator" speech: describe who you are or what you do in ten seconds or less.
  4. When appropriate, offer a business card, and ask the other person for one of his or hers. Sometimes, it is more appropriate to exchange business cards when only you depart from one another.
- Once the event is over, your networking doesn't stop! Be sure to follow up with those you've met, keep in contact, share information and offer to help in any way you can.
- Be sure to send a written acknowledgement or "Thank You" note to your networking contacts.

## TIPS FOR WORKING A ROOM

In many networking events, you will find yourself with time to "mingle" among the other attendees before the formal program begins. It may be beneficial for you to spend some time planning and preparing how you will "work the room" to get the most from your efforts.

- Start with small talk.
- Don't stay too long in one place. After eight to ten minutes, excuse yourself with pleasantries such as, "It was nice meeting you..."

- Let preparation and practice be your guide. Spend some time planning your conversation generators.

## TIPS FOR WORKING A TABLE

Many networking events will feature a meal if held during meal time hours. It is crucial to practice good table etiquette to make the best impression.

- Make the introductions. Proceed as if you're host of the table.
- Sit and listen to learn. Start the conversation by asking questions: why people are there, what they hope to gain, how they found out about the event. Avoid monopolizing the conversation.
- Keep your business cards handy. Do not deal them out impersonally.
- Practice good table etiquette. Let common sense and consideration of others be your guide.

## NETWORKING/INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

The informational interview is a tried and true method used to gather information and gain insights when searching for career opportunities and exploring new options. When asking for an informational interview:

- Be clear on your mission. Be honest with people by respecting their time, and don't have a hidden agenda.
- Make sure you have the right person. Sometimes your initial contact can direct you to someone more appropriate to your mission and purpose. Be open to suggestions as to who else you might contact.
- Be prepared and interested. Prepare your personal introduction, and plan your questions. Take notes, and try to keep the meeting to a half hour.
- Always send a "Thank You" note!

Adapted from "how to use interviews and networking," by Deb Koen, Vice President of Career Development Services; as it first appeared in the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, Sunday January 19, 2003. Used by Permission.

## CONCLUSION

Networking can be a fun and easy way to enrich your life, broaden your horizons, and enhance your career. But, it can also be potentially devastating if you act rudely, insensitively, or ignore the needs and desires of others. Remember, crucial to your success is that you treat networking as an exchange of ideas, information and experience. You are not selling or simply telling or "sponging" off of others for your own benefit only. Be generous in sharing your talents, experiences, and ideas, and always be respectful of those around you.

Good luck and have fun!

Contributed by Diane Mashia, Patron Member, Rochester Women's Network. Diane Mashia is President and Lead Consultant for Learning Out Loud, a professional development organization dedicated to performance improvement through active participation.