



## What Types of Connections Do Your Members Need?

How do you define 'networking?' The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as "the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions" which is how most of us view networking on a broad level. Personally, I like this definition better, "the introduction of people with common interests to each other" because it has a more profound outcome. Wally "Famous" Amos perhaps said it best, "I truly believe, when all is said and done, networking is just another way of saying, 'people helping people'."

I had the privilege of meeting and learning from author Ken Erdman, *Network Your Way to Success*, in 1994 when I worked as VP of Operations for the Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii and we booked him to deliver a seminar for our members. Although Ken is no longer among us, his principles resonated with me and helped me see networking in a whole different way. Ken said, "No matter where the networking process begins, it will be enhanced along the way by **contacts, relationships, experiences and information.**" Social media didn't arrive on the scene until much later and Ken's words are as true today as they were 16 years ago!

Ken taught us that people are looking for six types of connections in their networks:

1. **The Pros**—They help you get everyday tasks done efficiently and at good prices. You need these services on a regular basis and these people are anchors in your database. At times, you're in need of a new pro to replace someone or you have new regular needs so you're on the look out to meet the best ones available.
2. **The Librarians**—You can ask them anything since they always seem to have the answers! They are vast storehouses of knowledge and are multi-faceted people. Librarians are diverse readers of books, trade journals, magazines, newspapers, etc. They love challenges. Ask them a question and they'll go out of their way to get your answer, even by accessing other resources or experts in their network. And do all of this for the sheer joy of helping others with no personal agenda attached.
3. **Mentors**—They are more successful than you or have skill sets and knowledge you need. They set a standard for you personally or professionally. They take a vested interest in your success and can be called upon for special needs or introductions to others. They teach you how to navigate the waters and often share success secrets you never learned in school or through reading books. Mentors believe in cultivating their replacements and don't act as your competitors by holding back knowledge or contacts.
4. **Superknots**—You could not get along without them because they are very special friends who can seemingly get you in front of everyone who's worth knowing. They are seen as the 'super-networkers.' They grant many favors, have long memories, and will redeem those favors when needed.

5. **Advocates**—They are your evangelists and they tell everyone they know to buy from you. They act as your disciples because they love what you offer and promote you without any kick-backs or agendas. Advocates like and respect you and they're willing to tell others what they think about you. This kind of promotion can't be bought and is priceless!
6. **Tomorrows**—You haven't met these people yet and they are future connections that should be in your network. You will meet them by chance unexpectedly at events or through existing connections. As soon as you meet them, you recognize their worth and want to keep them in your network.

So, how can you help members develop stronger networks? Employ these tips and you will build your members and your own networking skills:

- **Send Four Cards a Week**—Find reasons to send out four handwritten notes every week to those in your network, to help those in your network, and to people you want in your network. Reasons can include: thank you, congratulations, thought you should know, this may be of interest to you, birthday, anniversary, sympathy, appreciation (you get the jist). When you take away the bills and junk mail received, most people don't get anything nice in the mail. Be the 'best thing that happened today.'
- **Make Four Calls a Day**—Do it for many of the same reasons above although something about a warm, personal voice in a time of stress, aggressive sales pitches, or a down economy can go a long way. Even if you leave a voice message, your outreach will be noticed and appreciated.
- **Develop Four New Contacts a Week**—You never know when you'll make a great new connection for you or for someone in your network. Strike up a conversation while standing in the grocery line or riding in an elevator with a stranger. Believe in '6 degrees of separation' and recognize that the new person you meet could become a friend, alliance or a new customer.
- **Play Matchmaker**—The best networkers listen to others, understand their needs, and share their resources. Referrals are wonderful and strategic introductions are the best type of referrals. Offer to introduce someone in your network to another who would be a great connection, supplier, customer, mentor or resource. You can do this through an e-mail, three-way call, or by bringing people together for coffee or lunch.

Start your new year strong by investing in your network and taking time to build on others' networks. You never know what doors you'll open or where they might lead. Leverage the power of people and realize that relationship economics is better than money in the bank! Happy networking!!

## **Cathi Hight**

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