

Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association

Career Center Tips: Traits of a TOP Networker



Networking is more than just shaking hands and passing out business cards. Networking is really about building your social capital. People must possess the following traits to be successful at developing and maintaining good relationships.

1. Timely follow-up on referrals

This is usually ranked as the No. 1 trait of successful networkers. If you present an opportunity -- whether it's a simple piece of information, a special contact or a qualified business referral -- to someone who consistently fails to follow up successfully, it's no secret that you'll eventually stop wasting your time with this person. Following up with what you say you're going to do, when you say you're going to do it, builds your credibility and trust with your network.

2. Positive attitude

A consistently negative attitude makes people dislike being around you and drives away referrals; a positive attitude makes people want to associate and cooperate with you. When you are positive, you're like a magnet; people want to be around you and will send their friends, family and associates to you. Positive attitudes are contagious. Being positive contributes to your determination, internal motivation and ultimate business success.

3. Enthusiasm/motivation

Think about the people you know who get the most referrals. They're the people who show the most motivation, right? It's been said that the best sales characteristic is enthusiasm. To be respected within our networks, we at least need to sell ourselves with enthusiasm.

Once we've done an effective job of selling ourselves, we can reap the reward of seeing our contacts sell us to others. That's motivation in and of itself. Enthusiasm aligns well with a positive attitude. Enthusiastic and motivated people make things happen for them -- and for the people they know.

4. Trustworthiness

When you refer one person to another, there is no doubt that you're putting your personal and professional reputation on the line. You have to be able to trust your referral partner and be trusted in return. Neither you nor anyone else will refer a contact or valuable information to someone who can't be trusted to handle it well. Trust, as we have been taught, is earned. It develops over time and throughout the life span of a relationship. Trust can never be taken lightly, because it plays such a huge role in your credibility.

5. Good listening skills

Our success as networkers depends on how well we can listen and learn from the people in our network. The faster you and your networking partner learn what you need to know about each other, the faster you'll establish a valuable relationship. Listening for the needs and problems of others can also position you to engage the services of the people you know. Many distractions can get in the way of listening well to each other. Communicating well takes focus and effective listening.

6. Commitment to networking 24/7

Master networkers are never formally off duty. (Well, maybe when they're asleep.) Networking is so natural to them that they can be found networking in the **grocery** checkout line, at the doctor's office, and while picking the kids up from school -- as well as at business mixers and networking meetings. Master networkers take advantage of every opportunity that's presented to them on a daily basis. They operate in the "givers gain" mind-set and are primarily looking for opportunities for the people in their network.

7. Gratitude

Gratitude is sorely lacking in today's business world. Expressing gratitude to business associates and clients is just another building block in the cultivation of relationships that will lead to increased referrals. People like to refer others to business professionals who go above and beyond. Thanking others at every opportunity will help you stand out from the crowd. Expressing sincere gratitude to the people who will one day be there to help you is not just a courtesy -- it's the right thing to do.

8. Helpfulness

Helping others can be done in a variety of ways, from simply showing up to help with an office move to clipping a useful and interesting article and mailing it to an associate or client. Master networkers keep their eyes and ears open for opportunities to advance other people's interests. They offer to help others whenever they can, because they authentically want to help. It's as simple as that. Master networkers get joy out of helping other people succeed.

9. Sincerity

Friendliness without sincerity is like a **cake** without frosting. You can offer the help, the thanks, the listening ear, but if you aren't sincerely interested in others, it will show -- and they'll know it. Those who have developed successful networking skills convey their sincerity at every turn.

One of the best ways to develop this trait is to give your undivided attention to the individual with whom you're developing a referral relationship. Don't multitask when you're on the phone; stop browsing the Web, balancing your **checkbook** and shining your shoes. When you multitask, nothing gets your full attention and everything suffers in some way; besides, people can tell when you're not all there. Make eye contact when you're speaking to them in person. Sincerely show that you care, and give your complete attention to the individual in front of you.

10. Dedicated to working one's network

Master networkers don't let any opportunity to work their networks pass them by. They manage their contacts with contact management software, organize their e-mail address files and carry their referral partners' business cards along with their own. They set up appointments to get better acquainted with new contacts and learn as much about them as possible, so they can truly become part of one another's networks.