

# Build your business through strategic networking

Milton J. Paris, Business Development and Coach 5:18 p.m. EDT September 2, 2014

*Networking is the best way to build your business. And the best way to learn how to do it is simply get out there and start talking.*



(Photo: FILE PHOTO)

Networking — it's the latest business trend. Or is it?

Actually, business owners have always engaged in the art and science of networking.

Only years ago it didn't have a name. Business owners would get together, shake hands, and smile and chat about themselves and their businesses. Same thing with "coaching." I've been a sales trainer for 40 years, but it wasn't until five or six years ago that someone said, "Milt, you're not a sales trainer, you're a coach." I always thought coaching was leading your kid's soccer or baseball team. Turns out I've been a "coach" for 40 years.

The buzzwords, however, aren't important. What counts is what you do. And if you're a business owner looking to grow your business, then networking should be a way of life for you. It's how you climb the ladder of success. But if you don't actually climb that ladder, you won't go anywhere. That's why it's called networking!

While you can network anywhere — I've met some really great clients while eating at the local diner — a good place to begin is by joining a networking group. It's an excellent way to meet a lot of potential "suspects" who have the potential to become "prospects."

Here you will have a brief opportunity to stand up and talk about yourself and your business to a group of people who share the same goals you do. In essence, you become a 60-second commercial. When given the opportunity to "sell" yourself, be sharp and to the point. Look directly at your audience, not at the ground or up at the ceiling. Make eye contact. It lets your peers know that you're confident.

Once your commercial is over, get out in the crowd and talk to people. Work them like a politician works a crowd. But don't be pushy; don't use fancy words — not everyone is a Princeton graduate, and make sure you give a firm handshake. Trust me, you can tell if a person is positive or negative by their handshake. And be a good listener. Listen 80% of the time, talk 20%.

But most importantly, don't make this an "it's all about me" affair. Remember, you're not the only person there networking. You're all in the same boat. When you introduce yourself, don't hand someone your business card and immediately tell them what you do. Show an interest in others — talk about what they do. Ask them questions about themselves and their families; develop a rapport. In other words, don't kiss on the first date!

You'll know if there's any "chemistry" between you. If there is, make arrangements to meet at another time and place to discuss your mutual interests. Why eat lunch by yourself? And always ask for a referral.

While there's no harm in speaking to everyone, do target your audience — seek out people who you know would benefit your business. But even if you determine there's nothing worth pursuing, a particular business owner may have other clients that can help you. You may speak to a business owner with whom you have no mutual interest, but you're also talking to his/her 30 "suspects" who may become "prospects."

As for that business card — make sure it describes what service you are offering. Your card is your billboard. I suggest putting your photo on it. If I don't remember what you do, chances are I will toss the card. When you receive someone's card, don't wait a week or three weeks to make contact. Follow-up in a day or two.

The key to successful networking is practicing your presentation. Write down your message and key points and practice it over and over. Repetition leads to confidence. Practice in front of your spouse or friends and neighbors. Practice is especially important for people who are terrified to speak in public, which is about 99 percent of the total population. You may even want to consider hiring a coach.

There's also the "likeability factor" to consider. In order to sell your product or service, you have to sell yourself. And if people like and trust you, they'll sign that contract. Conversely, if they don't like you, you can be selling gold in your pockets, but they won't buy.

Networking is the best way to build your business. You can read a million books about it, but unless you get out there and do it, you'll never even reach the first rung of that ladder.

Milton Paris is president of the Getting Ahead in Business consulting firm. He will present Business Meet N' Greet noon to 1:30 p.m. Sept. 17 at

Bonefish Grill, 55 Route 9, Manalapan, and 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Sept. 30 at Per Tutti Italian Grille, 49 E. Railroad Ave., Jamesburg. Admission is \$12 to Bonefish Grill and \$10 to Per Tutti. RSVP to the networking buffets by Sept. 15 and 26 respectively. For more info, call 732-306-0040 or email [Milton@gettingaheadinbusiness.com](mailto:Milton@gettingaheadinbusiness.com).

Read or Share this story: <http://mycj.co/1rLoyNR>