

10 Networking Blunders That Cost You Sales

Networking is a critical skill sales people; after all, the more people you connect with the more you sales opportunities you create. However, many sales people make a variety of mistakes that prevent them from maximizing the power of networking. Here are ten blunders and mistakes you need to avoid.

1. **Attending the wrong networking events.** When I first started my business I attended as many local networking events as I could fit into my schedule. However, I quickly noticed that I encountered the same people at these events—other small business owners out looking for business. These people were not my target market and very few of them interacted with the type of decision-maker I usually worked with so I realized that I was going to the wrong events. Get the most from your networking opportunities by showing up at events that your prospects attend.

2. **Waiting for people to introduce themselves.** Let's face it; the vast majority of people are reluctant or hesitant to approach strangers. However, if you take the initiative to introduce yourself to others you will be perceived as a person of authority and power. Not to mention that the other person will be relieved that they didn't have to make the first approach.

3. **Spending too much time talking.** One of the most fatal mistakes is to dominate the conversation. If you truly want to make a great impression, limit the amount you talk to no more than 40 percent of the airtime. Remember, networking events are not the appropriate setting to sell your solution. However, they are perfect situations to uncover potential sales opportunities.

4. **Failing to ask other people questions.** The most effective way to create a connection with someone is to ask them questions about their business and what they do. Ask them about the challenges they face and what they enjoy most about their work. High-value questions encourage people to share information and help you position yourself as an expert and a great networker.

5. **Becoming distracted by other people.** Have you ever had a conversation with someone who constantly watched the room instead of paying attention to what you were saying? If so, you likely felt ignored and unimportant. I also suspect that you would not refer business to that person. Don't make the same mistake. Pay close attention to every person you meet and learn how you might be able to help them.

6. **Focusing on your self-interest.** This follows the last point. If you make the effort to find out how you can help someone else, the chances are they will reciprocate. In the words of motivational guru, Zig Ziglar,

“You can anything you want in life if you just are willing to help enough other people get what they want.”

7. **Failing to articulate your value proposition.** I once spoke with a small business owner at a networking event and after a 20 minute conversation I still had no idea what she did because she was unable to clearly articulate the purpose of her company and her ideal client.

8. **Failing to establish a connection.** Effective networking means connecting with people. Although you will not connect with everyone you meet, you can improve your results by making great eye contact, smiling, asking questions, and showing interest in the other person.

9. **Executing the “meet & move” strategy.** We've all encountered the person at a networking event who introduces themselves, gives you their business card, asks for yours in return, and immediately moves on to repeat the process with another victim. You get much better results by connecting with a small number of people rather than trying to meet as many people as you can.

10. **Failing to follow-up afterwards.** Post-event follow-up is critical. However, don't make the mistake of calling someone three months after a networking meeting and saying something like, “We met a few months ago and I thought I'd touch base with you.” This approach simply does not add any type of value to the relationship. Here two follow-up strategies to consider:

- When you meet a potential customer, arrange to contact them shortly after the event. Mark it in your calendar and make sure you contact them on the agreed-upon day and time.
- After you meet someone who is NOT a prospect, look for opportunities to refer business to them. You can also help them by sending articles or information related to their business.

Networking effectively can have a dramatic impact on your sales providing it is done correctly. Avoid these fatal networking mistakes and improve your results.

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