



## The “Work” of Networking

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### The 12 Most Common Networking Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

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**I**t has been estimated that each of us has a network of 250 people.

That is the average number of people you could expect to come to your wedding or your funeral.

In support of this theory, if given a little time, you could probably write down the names of 250 people – the people you know on a first name basis. Experts in networking will tell you how to leverage that network when you need it. They will teach you how to gain access into the networks of others. They will tell you that tapping the networks of others will exponentially increase the size of your own network.

Let's say you list the names of 50 people who you know. If each of them knows 50 people and they know 50 people and so on and so on, the numbers add up very quickly.

So networking should be fairly simple. You simply contact the people you know, tell them what help you need and voila, the work of networking is complete.

Alas, it doesn't work that easily.

Just because you can list the names of 50 or 250 people, that doesn't mean that you can count on them to help you in the achievement of your goals.

Ask yourself this question. Who is the one person you would cheerfully get out of bed at 2:00 a.m. to help? For this example, you can't choose an immediate family member. Obligation would certainly get most of us out of bed in that service. Who is that person, that person to whom you have no obligation? Who is the individual you would cheerfully help out of a jam? That person has a strong link in their network – a strong link to you.

How can you become that person to others? The answer to that question is the key to successful networking.

Expert fishermen know to carefully select their fishing location, select an appropriate lure designed to attract the fish they wish to attract and exercise patience. When they aren't fishing, they are reviewing their successes and failures, watching the weather, planning their next

journey and tending to their nets. They know that their ability to maximize their success rests on the smallest detail – from reviewing their goals, to honing their strategy to ensuring the strength of each link in their net.



So it is with anyone who desires success in their occupation. As they move through their days, they attend to the urgent needs of the day. When they are not actively involved in their key activities, they attend to reflection, planning, preparation and maintenance of the smallest detail. Or do they?

In our all-too-busy-lives, attending to the work behind the work often doesn't get the attention it deserves. That is, until the work begins to suffer and then we get to the work behind the work. With a great urgency, we look for shortcuts, we look for efficiency. We look for ease. What we frequently fail to understand is that if we take the time it takes, it takes less time.

There are a number of traditional approaches to networking. Sadly, many of them do not get the job done. In their pursuit of simplicity, they overlook the basic human condition attached to networking.

The purpose of this article is to debunk networking myths, point out common mistakes and provide practical suggestions to help you build and strengthen your network.

## The 'Work' of Networking

It is not enough to merely want a healthy, helpful network. What are you willing to give in exchange for it? Nature frowns upon the idea of something for nothing. It is a basic law of nature that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

Consider the example of a gardener. A good gardener carefully tills and seeds the garden. During the growing season, he or she weeds the garden and waters it. In the fall the gardener enjoys a bountiful harvest. What happens if the gardener simply throws some seed

packets on the ground and doesn't care for the garden? They have a bountiful crop of weeds! You can try this over and over again and you'll always get the same results. Do the work and you'll have a wonderful garden. Just toss some seeds on the ground and you won't.

The gardener can busy themselves every day with many activities but it is only the careful selection of fertile, sun-drenched ground followed by activities related to sowing, weeding, and watering that will result in a bountiful crop. Sowing your seeds on an interstate highway will not result in much of a crop. Complaining later about your misfortune is a waste of time.

So it is with networking. You cannot enjoy the achievement of your goals without putting forth action. Like the skilled gardener, the skilled networker knows that the results are not immediate. Yet so many of us think we can harvest a healthy bounty from a network that has not been cultivated or cared for. When we are unsuccessful with our approach, we fix blame and complain rather than taking the actions called for.

What are you willing to give in exchange for the achievement of your goals? Are the actions you are taking to grow and care for your network going to give you the results you wish to achieve?

Note that in the center of the word networking is found the word *work*. Developing the skills of effective networking and doing the required work returns many benefits in the future. And like the gardener, the benefits are greatly multiplied when the work is done well. The gardener plants only one seed but each successful seed produces a plant containing hundreds of seeds.

## How Effective Networks Work

Many people mistakenly think that the network connections closest to them are the ones that are the most important.

Did you know that most people who find new jobs, do so because of connections through a network? Did you also realize that most of time, these contacts are made through distant links – people who are not directly connected to you.

In other words, the people who are most closely linked to you would probably tell you about job opportunities.

It is making the more distant connections, with people who have access to different networks, that makes for the most effective networking.

Therefore, the goal of networking is not simply to make more connections to you. The goal is to make a network of connections, many among other people with no obvious link to you. Those closest to you probably have a very similar network to you. Those furthest away have different networks that you can access if the relationship is a good one.

It is important that the relationships be good so that the links are strong and positive. You can probably think of negative links you have with people you have never even met thanks to the feedback and word-of-mouth of people within your network.

Each time you make a meaningful connection with another person, you have moved one step closer to gaining permission to interact with the other person's network.

## 12 Networking Mistakes

Why don't we do a better job of networking? Let's look at twelve of the common networking mistakes made, the myths that perpetuate them and strategies to avoid them.

### Myth #1: Business Card Blizzard

Put your business card in as many hands as possible. That's the best way to network.



**Reality:** Your business card is a networking tool. Like any tool, it should be used appropriately and carefully.

Simply putting your business card in as many hands as possible, before you've established value for it, is guaranteed to land your card in the nearest trash can or in a large, ignored pile somewhere. Networking is more than simply showing your business card in front of someone or making your rehearsed speech about what you do to as many people as possible. Use your business

card as a tool to exchange business cards with others in your network.

### **Myth #2: “Do Your Homework” Networking**

Research everything and everyone. At the networking event, dazzle everyone with your knowledge.

**Reality:** While it’s always advisable to keep up to date on current events, changes in your industry and changes in the lives of the members of your network, networking should be a dialogue, not a monologue.

### **Myth #3: Techno-networking**

Take advantage of the latest and greatest in technology. With all the advanced methods of communication you can reach more people, more efficiently and with more information. In fact, done right, you might not even have to talk to people.



**Reality:** Technology can help you follow-up with contacts, stay in touch, respond to inquiries quickly and generally make life simpler. However, networking always has been, and continues to be, a social interaction. Without making a human connection with others, your message will not have the same level of power.

### **Myth #4: “Check That Box” Networking**

The best way to network is to put a few dates on the calendar and dedicate yourself to meeting as many people as possible at those events.

**Reality:** Networking events play an important role in building and sustaining your network. But they are only a part. People who are excellent at networking know that their network needs care and that follow-up is a critical component in the maintenance of a network.

### **Myth #5: “Refer Me Please” Networking**

Identify a few people who seem to have great networks and call on them when you need a referral or help.

**Reality:** Networking is a reciprocal relationship. People who only call on others when they need something are at risk of making important people frustrated and angry.

### **Myth #6: “Strings Attached” Networking**

Each time you make a helpful referral to someone, or offer a gift or service, remember to ask for something in exchange.

**Reality:** The people we like the best are the ones who willingly offer their help, without expectation of payment. When assistance comes with “strings attached” the relationship (and the network) is sure to suffer.

### **Myth #7: Should-ing Networking**

Make an effort to provide advice to people on the areas you have some expertise or experience in.

**Reality:** Only provide advice when asked for it. There are few things more annoying to people than unsolicited advice and being told what they “should” and “should not” do, however well intentioned the advice may be.

### **Myth #8: Interrogator Networking**

Good networking requires the ability to ask questions. Ask many questions and respond to questions with questions.

**Reality:** While people skilled at the art of networking know how to ask questions to learn more about others, they also realize that networking is a dialogue in which both people should contribute. If you aren’t willing to be open, why should others?

### **Myth #9: “All About Me” Networking**

The purpose of networking is to let people know about you. Use every opportunity to tie the conversation back to your main objective.



**Reality:** When the entire conversation continually centers around one person – usually the same person, others grow tired of the interaction, even if it is interesting. Take a sincere interest in others, they will respond in kind.

### Myth #10 – Snob Networking

When short on time, seek out the most influential people in the room. It is a waste of time and a diversion to spend time with people who can't help you achieve your goals.

**Reality:** While the key decision-makers are fairly easy to spot (but not always), key influencers are often difficult to identify. By avoiding certain people, cutting conversations short, or being impolite, you may be alienating someone that could enhance your network.

### Myth #11 – Good Ole Boy (or Girl) Networking

Spend time with people like you. Since you already have many things in common, they will be easier to relate to and will probably be more helpful.

**Reality:** We enjoy spending time with people like us but we learn most from those who are different. Leave your comfort zone. Meet new people. Expand your network. You might learn something!

### Myth #12 – “Whatever it Takes” Networking

Getting busy people to agree to meet with you can be a challenge. Once you've identified the individual(s) you want to network with, do whatever it takes to get an appointment. Once you're in their presence, you can reveal your true agenda.

**Reality:** One of the quickest ways to offend someone is to mislead them. Whether an act of omission (not being clear on your meeting purpose) or an act of commission (lying, or stretching the truth, to secure an appointment), your efforts will not be rewarded as you had hoped.

## Conclusion

Computers don't do business with computers.  
Businesses don't do business with businesses.  
People do business with people.

The ability to relate well to people is cited as the number one factor contributing to the success of the highest paid professionals. So the ability to network well is definitely a skill worth mastering.



If we can learn to focus more on the other person and less on ourselves, we can determine what makes another person tick and cultivate the relationships that will ultimately form the critical links that make up our network. The success of careers and businesses depends on it.

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Tero International, Inc. is a corporate training and development leader, serving prestigious clients such as Wells Fargo, Pella Windows and Doors, Nationwide Insurance and Kemin Industries from its state-of-the-art training facility in Des Moines, Iowa. Since 1993, Tero has developed distinctive courses in corporate etiquette and international protocol, presentation skills, negotiations and conflict resolution, leadership, time management, teambuilding and interviewing skills and is currently educating businesspeople in the United States, Canada, Asia, India, Mexico and Europe.

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