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# Network without offending

## Learn how to tailor your networking approach for different occasions

Someone once asked me: "Aren't there times when networking isn't appropriate? I feel like I am never able to relax and enjoy an event. I want to be a successful networker." Although I advocate that networking is a lifestyle and that you need to incorporate it into everything you do, I also believe that you must honour the event.

This means that in some cases, you are going to network a lot differently than you would in other cases. For example, networking at a chamber mixer is one thing, while networking at a church social is something completely different.

First, you must understand what I mean by "networking". I believe that networking is part of the process of developing your social capital.

Building your social capital hinges on the development of meaningful relationships with other people. Since one should always be working on building meaningful relationships with other people, he or she should always be networking.

However, that does not mean someone should always be trying to sell something to someone, because that rarely facilitates the development of meaningful relationships.

Herein lies the misinterpretation of the practice of networking. Some people think that

networking means to be constantly selling your products or services.

To me, networking means that you should constantly build relationships. The best way to build relationships is to help someone whenever possible. A good networker has two ears and one mouth and should use them proportionately.

Hence, if you understand networking to be the process one uses to develop relationships and build one's social capital, then it makes sense that someone should network everywhere — including the church social. The key is that you must honour the event.

To truly honour the event, you need to network appropriately. That means your networking approach must be different in a chamber meeting compared to a social event. In both cases, you should make contacts, put people together, help others and build relationships.

However, you should not be actively promoting your business in one of those two groups. (Hint: It is not the chamber.) Instead, at a church function, you should simply focus on putting people together and helping others.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. Last year, I had the opportunity to attend a formal black-tie social event, not a business networking dinner. Yet I was able to make a great contact that ended up being immensely successful for me (and, I hope, for one of the people I met there).

You see, seated at my table were a prominent senior partner to a major international law firm, a former member of the Beach Boys and Buzz Aldrin, who was a part of the first mission to set foot on the moon and is now an

entrepreneur as the founder of the ShareSpace Foundation.

During the course of the evening, I mentioned to Mr Aldrin that I was working on a new book entitled *Masters Of Success*. He had certainly attained a well-known level of success and had some very strong feelings about the future of the space programme, so I thought he might be interested in sharing his thoughts in this new book.

After getting to know each other better, I asked him if he would be interested in contributing a chapter to the book. He was. Consequently, he became one of the prominent contributing authors to a book that was about to be released, and I believe it was a win-win for both of us.

As you can see, it is desirable to keep your networking goals in sight at all events and opportunities, without becoming a networking vulture or someone that everyone else runs from when they see you coming. Honour the event and tailor your networking strategies so that you fit in without being tuned out.

Another very important aspect of successful, active networking is to be sincere. There are people who are so successful at networking that they are able to network virtually everywhere, and it is because they really care about making connections for others, not just for themselves.

I have also seen that those who network exclusively for selfish gain come across as very shallow and insincere.

Make no mistake about it: Networking can be done with a selfish end in mind, but if you are truly living the mantra that "givers gain", you will come across very differently.

No one minds the opportune exchange of information that will benefit one or more people, even when that exchange takes the form of a business card at a birthday party. — **Source: ST/ANN**

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