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Is Networking Really Essential?

Are you among the minority unsure about the benefits of networking? Is it just another meeting you're expected to attend? Would you rather be doing "real" work? You may ask yourself these questions every time you're at one of these networking events, sitting in the corner on your phone.

Now consider a few questions: How did you get that family doctor you love? How did you find the last honest plumber when you couldn't find the cause of a leak under your sink? Did you ask your neighbour or a friend? Or did you just use Google? Most of us get our services from our personal networks, not the Yellow Pages!

We need to do the same with our professional lives. By attending condo-related events, you will meet and get to

know key people within your industry. You will meet influencers within the condo industry who can introduce you to other people and opportunities. The connections you make during a networking event will provide information, referrals, or opportunities for the future. This is particularly helpful if you're trying to find that next great employee, advance in your own career, get your continuing education points, or maybe you need a new service provider. Networking isn't just crucial in today's business world; it's necessary!

How to Network

Shrewd professionals realize that while there will always be a place for cold calling, it may not be the most

effective way to get the best connections.

Networking is a tool; as the name says, it's net-WORKING, not net-SITTING. It takes time and effort, but well worth the work you put in. Don't attend networking events and just sit in a corner and not interact with the other attendees; that wastes your time. When attending an event, at the very least, take the time to introduce yourself to everyone at your table and ask what they do and how you can help them. Can you help to introduce them to someone in the room? Are they looking for a particular company or service? I am a serial networker, and when I meet people and learn a bit about their business, I try to proactively tell them that "you should meet this connection of mine." I do this with

great intent, as it will be hard for the person to refuse you in return if you ask for an introduction to someone. This give-and-take is what networking is all about. If you help someone, they will be more apt to assist you in return; networking must benefit both parties involved.

Strategic Networking

Make sure to do your research before joining too many groups or associations. Are they relevant to your

industry? Are they legitimate organizations? You may even want to try a few before joining; most will have non-member rates like ACOMO. Start with one or two, it may be tempting to join everything, but you will quickly realize that a better strategy is to target your efforts, not to mention your valuable time, towards the groups that best fit your professional requirements and perhaps your personal pursuits.

Don't expect to attend one event and think connections and key contacts will

pour in. Networking is like dating; you wouldn't get married after your first date. Building rapport and a professional relationship takes time and effort, but through good networking, your professional relationships will be based on a solid foundation and will be long-lasting. The point of networking events is to leave with connections, not business.

Also, don't discount the people you meet with whom you don't do business. I have often been introduced to the "right" person by a connection I had made while networking. The importance and value of a referral network are HUGE! Even though I may not be able to use your services, I may have a very robust network and know someone who does. Within your networking contacts, you will develop a list of people you trust and see regularly. Think of your referral network as your feet on the street! The old saying, "It's not about WHAT you know but WHO you know," still holds true!

Be a strategic networker and not a business card blackjack dealer! Don't automatically hand out your business cards to all. Pretend your business card is a \$20 bill and become a miser. Take a second to think about where the business cards you are given end up! Your card will likely go in the recycling bin unless I've made a connection with you. Like all professionals, I don't have the time to connect with everyone, but the connections I make are usually with professionals I've "clicked" with!

Become an Expert Networker

Become that person who knows everyone and is always ready to help. Once you join a networking group, becoming an active participating member is essential. The most successful networker offers something of value to their fellow group members rather than just using the association or group to further their own goals. This could be sharing their valuable contacts, becoming a mentor to someone, or being a subject matter expert, for example.

Online Networking

Is there such a thing? Absolutely! Zoom and Teams meetings are the norms nowadays, so use those events to set up more one-on-one meetings. Social Media can also be an unexpectedly



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valuable tool! I typically use it to be my authentic self when following up with my contacts or trying to start or further a connection. When you post something on LinkedIn, for example, how grateful are you when one of your contacts likes it or, even better, comments on it? Commenting and liking posts is a great way to let a contact get to know you better professionally.

Volunteering & Networking

Volunteering is a great way to organically and authentically build deeper rapport. Whether with a local charity for personal reasons or volunteering to be on ACMO's Board of Directors or one of our many committees, you will most likely be volunteering with people with which you have something in common. Whatever the reason, it is a great way to connect even more meaningfully, as typically, because it is usually a smaller group, connections are generally deeper.

Networking & Mental Health

Can networking help support positive mental health? – One of

the unforeseen outcomes of a global pandemic has been the rapidly increasing number of mental health issues in the workplace or for the many still working remotely or in hybrid roles at home. This sudden isolation has intensified feelings of being disconnected and alone. Most leaders feel they must make the hard decisions on their own, but connecting with peers can be a profoundly positive experience. Awareness that others have similar experiences and feelings can be a tremendous support. They can relate to what you are going through and will most likely have an answer or at least be able to point you in the right direction to resolve whatever issue.

A sense of belonging is perhaps one of the best and most compelling reasons to network. Being a part of an active community of like-minded professionals offers a sense of being part of something bigger than yourself.

Start Networking Now!

Joining an organization like ACMO allows you to develop new connections and exponentially expand your reach.

One of the most valuable things ACMO offers our members is the opportunity to network. Why not practice your networking skills at the next educational luncheon, golf tournament, or Condo Conference? What better way to do that than to meet key influencers in your industry and make lasting, mutually beneficial connections?

Not a member yet? Contact ACMO to learn more about the many benefits of membership, including networking opportunities. We look forward to connecting with you at an event soon! ■

Sonia Ojha joined ACMO, as the Manager of Membership Development, in February 2023, bringing her membership expertise from nearly 14 years at the local Chamber of Commerce. Sonia is an admitted serial networker and gives her free time to the Canadian Cancer Society and Big Brothers Big Sisters Foundation. Sonia looks forward to connecting with everyone at ACMO's many networking opportunities! She can be reached at sojha@acmo.org. acmo.org



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