

Networking Success

It's the time to rub elbows with those you hope to get to know in the coming months. Networking opportunities can be disastrous if we forget the basic rules. Here are a few tips that will ensure your networking success.

- 1. Choose your outfit wisely.** A little holiday flair is fine, but remain conservative and look businesslike.
- 2. Be strategic.** Company sponsored holiday parties are free but many non-profits charge to attend. If you are paying, choose the functions that can give you more networking mileage for your dollar, make sure the people who attend are the people you want to connect with to build a relationship.
- 3. Maintain your professional decorum at all times.** Even though you are at a "holiday party" leave the weekend personality at home. "Tis not the time to be jolly."
- 4. Always carry lots of business cards.** Be prepared to do business at anytime. This is especially important for self-employed individuals. Remember give only one card unless the person asks for more.
- 5. Practice your 30-second commercial.** You should be able to articulate what you do in 30 seconds or less. Keep it short.
- 6. Bring a GREAT attitude.** Be up-beat, do not talk about your problems with your boss, your job or that you will not be getting that Christmas bonus back at the office.
- 7. Limit alcohol consumption.** An open bar does not mean you need to try all the exotic drinks or load up on FREE beer. Even though it's a holiday party, be wise when consuming alcohol.
- 8. Set networking goals.** Plan to meet 3-5 people while at a reception. The aim is to build quality relationships. Collecting lots of business cards does not ensure quality, just volume. When possible target a few key people if you know ahead of time who will be attending.
- 9. Avoid controversial topics like religion and politics.** Talk about career goals, sports and business news etc. Have some knowledge of current local and world events.
- 10. Eat but don't over indulge.** Yes, the jumbo shrimp is usually plentiful but don't park yourself at the food table. It's always wise not to go to receptions starved. Most of your time should be spent mingling not eating.

11. Offer clean, dry handshakes. Hold your drinks in your left hand so the right hand is always free and warm.

12. Listen more than you talk. Figure out how you can help someone instead of always looking for people to help you.

13. Follow-Up. Don't wait for the new year, call, email or write a quick note within one week to begin a dialog with your new contacts.

5 TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS

1. Give More Informal Feedback. Don't wait to tell employees if they are doing a good or bad job. Timely feedback goes the farthest. Periodic feedback enables supervisors to re-enforce good performance and root out objectionable behavior. Don't let a lot of administrative structures tie you down in the "process" of feedback -- drop a note, e-mail, or voice-mail to a deserving employee, or a direct verbal comment makes the most impact.

2. Avoid Dramatic Showdowns. Letting problems fester or a poor relationship deteriorate can only lead to dramatic showdowns. Rarely does anyone come off looking good after these incidents. They are disruptive and disturbing for all, including managers and supervisors. You can preempt an argument by seeing someone unscheduled on their turf, or by scheduling a difficult meeting outside the office. Plan ahead to cover sensitive issues in a way that does not exacerbate the situation. Always be in control of your response, and never allow the discussion to turn into personally insulting dialogue.

3. Kindness is a Virtue. Try a little kindness in your everyday dealings with your employees. Besides being its own benefit, kindness in the right amount can increase morale and productivity. An inexpensive gift or card can go a long way in sustaining or repairing a work relationship with subordinates (and co-workers).

4. Keep Regularly Scheduled Performance Evaluations. Employees have a great deal invested in their jobs, and they can get anxious when annual performance reviews come around. Keeping these scheduled dates sacred goes a long way to avoiding problems down the road. Many disgruntled workers' primary complaint is that the employer neglected to keep regularly scheduled reviews, or ignored them altogether. Employees need feedback in order to know what they are doing right and what needs improvement. They also expect that well-run companies recognize and timely act on this. This has obvious benefits to companies, too.

5. Watch Your Bedside Manner. There are many different management styles, but one component is being aware of how you are perceived by others. Miscommunications can be easily averted by imagining yourself as the receiver of the message you are sending. Even bad news can be handled with tact and efficiency. Employees will be less willing to pursue grudges against those managers

who have expressed themselves appropriately and with some sympathy. Balance the company's need with respect for the individual.

5 TIPS FOR EMPLOYEES

1. Seek Feedback and Clarification. If you are unsure about whether you have done a good job on a project, don't let your bewilderment poison your attitude. Take it upon yourself to be appropriately proactive in seeking the feedback that will allow you to move forward. Managers frequently are busy and do not realize they have forgotten to let you know how you did, and so they do not always take the initiative in giving you feedback. Try to keep the lines of communication open to the extent you have control.

2. Look Down the Road. If a company seems to be making some major changes that may not include you, don't wait until the axe falls. Get on top of the situation and make a decision about whether you will wait it out or seek a new position. Bemoaning a restructuring may be natural, but it does not have to be the engine that decides your workplace fate.

3. Keep the Boss Happy, When You Can. No one likes a sycophant, but there are ways to keep your supervisor happy that all of us must learn and practice in order to have satisfaction in our careers and jobs. Being pleasant, helpful, and cooperative aids in the workplace, and is a habit we should carry with us when we are not at work. There may come a time when a boss is unpleasant, or worse. If you cannot tolerate his unpleasantness, you may need to dust off that resume.

4. Keep Evaluations in Perspective. Evaluations are simply a touch-base session with your supervisor regarding your recent work performance. While many of us link what we are with what we do, we should not let our sense of self be tied to evaluations, even if they involve raises. If your review contains negative comments you feel are erroneous, they should be used as a guide on how to re-package yourself so that your next review is more positive. Respectfully and appropriately disagree is you can do so without causing a rift with your boss. Also, because most evaluations come only once a year, there is much anticipation surrounding them. Don't let that eagerness cloud your ability to separate one person's opinion about you from how you view yourself.

5. Trust Your Instincts. Most people have good instincts as to whether they are held in good esteem by their superiors or whether they are in the doghouse. But sometimes people ignore their instincts, usually because the reality is difficult to accept. If you are experiencing anxiety at work, you must either work things out with your employer or take appropriate steps to find another job. It's better to leave on your own terms than have the terms imposed upon you. Take control and trust your instincts.

These tips are some common sense ways to improve your workplace situation. They are not a cure-all, but if practiced often, they can benefit employers and employees. If you feel that the issue you are facing in the workplace may be a legal one, seek the help of a competent lawyer as soon as possible.