

WHAT IS NETWORKING?

Someone asked me recently “what is networking?”

I had to think for a moment – what is it actually and what is it to me.

I found this definition - ***Developing and using contacts made in business for purposes beyond the reason for the initial contact.***

The ability to network is a crucial way for individuals with business ambitions to meet the clients, customers and contacts necessary to grow their business. Many people go to networking events, but very few know how to network effectively. Networking is more than just getting out and meeting people. Networking is a structured plan to get to know people who will do business with you or introduce you to those who will.

Networking is not about how many business cards you can collect, it is about relationships and this is particularly true when women network. They want to get to know people and build relationships. I can talk about networking for women as I have been heavily involved in two women’s groups – National Women’s Network NW and Handbags & Briefcases. And am now setting up a business club for women called Evolution Club.

After “the what is networking” question I looked at where I had obtained business over the years since I formed my business. And I talked to others members of the networks. Personally if I had sat at home and waited for business to find me I would be still sitting here with no work! My work has come through networking – not the “meet someone at an event and do business” but meet someone who passes my name on, my reputation spreads and business happens. In fact 100% of my work has been through networking.

Other people I know have also found leads through networking and have given leads to another contact of theirs where a particular skill is needed. But this is not a formal referral system, it is getting to know, like and trust people so that you are comfortable when recommending them to your contacts.

Networking should also be taken the wider sense. When I first set up my business I accepted every invitation that came my way from seminars, training, referral organisations and every network meeting. Wherever you are, wherever you meet people you have the opportunity to talk about what you do and I did that. I learnt to network and I spread my circle of contacts.

Each year I produce a business plan for my business and I include in that my networking strategy. Yes, at first it was go to every event but now I am more selective and attend events in line with my strategy. And I can’t network constantly, I have to work too!

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