

Networking Tips from Surprising Sources

Business networking isn't new; any place where people gathered to exchange ideas and contact information, get to know each other and transact business with each other were all precursors. Think of the Agoras of the ancient Greeks, Stonehenge, the salons of Paris at the time of the Revolution, the Continental Congress of our own history; these are all examples of how our ancestors 'networked'. Before Social Media, texting and yes, even email and the invention of the telephone (!), our ancestors grappled with how to improve their social lives, forge beneficial connections, and strengthen their reputations.



Centuries later, not all that much has changed. We can all benefit from techniques that will help us win new friends, enhance our networks, and support the smoother advancement of our businesses and even our lives.

For messages with a networking context, let's look at some sayings that have withstood (or perhaps transcended?) the test of time. These sayings double as today's new rules for social engagement and business networking, leading to greater opportunities for success.

"A closed mouth catches no flies." (Italian Proverb)

True, networking is fundamentally about talking and you need to open your mouth in order to talk. The message here is you do not need to dominate the conversation. Ask probing questions of your new acquaintance; learn more about their business and how you may be able to help them succeed. If they do networking 'right', they will reciprocate and ask you the same type of questions. If not, you still benefit from the experience by knowing that is one person you would rather not see again.

"A man may well bring a horse to the water but he cannot make him drink." (John Heywood)

Not all of us are comfortable meeting new people. To ease the situation, consider befriending a person who is well connected; namely, a connector. Connectors are easy to spot because they are always running into people they know. Connectors are often conduits to an improved business networking life. By reaching out to a connector, you can more readily build a bridge to a broader community.



“A bird in the hand is worth two in a bush.” (English Proverb)

Hmmm, how can this be a networking tip, you may ask? One thing that irks many when attending networking events is the tendency for some individuals to not be engaged in the current conversation, but rather to be scanning the room for their next ‘mark’. The message here is to approach networking with the goal of having deep, meaningful conversations rather than swooping through the room, gathering as many cards as you can hold.

“Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.” (Benjamin Franklin)

The pre-eminent America’s statesman, inventor and proverbial proverber (and yes, I know that is not a word) of his time, Ben was apparently taken by the knowledge that good sleeping habits made him feel better and think more clearly, thus penning this message. Our overextended, hectic lives can often leave us too sleep-deprived and out of sorts. Shut off the computer, turn off the phone, get some quality sleep. And speaking of computers and phones, if you are at a networking event, put the phone or tablet away – be in the moment with conversation with people rather than devices. Friends and business associates will enjoy their interactions with you more, which may lead to more opportunities.

“Birds of a feather flock together” (English Proverb)

There are two messages in this pithy statement, one pro and one con for business networking. The pro message is getting together with like-minded people to learn more about each other and hopefully (eventually) transact business. The con comes when people stay within their clique and don’t venture out to meet new people or, at a minimum, accept new additions to their widening circle. The purpose of networking is meeting and getting to know people, not just “dancing with the one that brung ya”. To more effectively network, be open to new acquaintances, not just your comfortable posse.



“‘Tis the part of a wise man to keep himself today for tomorrow and not venture all his eggs in one basket.” Cervantes in *Don Quixote*

This insight has particular relevance in today’s world of marketing our businesses. Social networking provides numerous avenues to explore, from LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram, etc., each media outlet has its place and while not all may be relevant for your market and your message, you need to be open to what may be relevant for your business. But spending all day behind a computer screen is too net-centric. “Networking” also implies “working the room” offline, and shaking things up by interacting in person. We can ignite our social lives by keeping all options open and putting our proverbial eggs in various baskets. Or to mix the metaphor even further, have multiple arrows in your marketing quiver.

"You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar." Giovanni Torriano, *Common Place of Italian Proverbs*'

Torriano captured the essence of diplomacy and discretion with this relevant adage, equally applicable to the salons of Paris or the Chamber lunch venue. Polite arguments and flattery are more persuasive than confrontational tactics. In today's world, that translates to "always think before shooting someone a caustic email, take the caps lock off and respond so that your mother would be proud." Don't publicly call out someone with whom you may disagree. Your behavior at networking events may reflect more than the marketing message you have tried so hard to hone. Make sure the whole package is something you want others to see and remember.

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