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The Art Of Networking for Business Generation

When you start working at a big law firm or other large company you probably do not have to worry about generating business. As a start-up law firm or business owner though, it is imperative to get out and meet people in order to get them interested in what you have to offer. In short, it is essential to network. As the founder of my new law firm, Scott Legal Services, P.C., I have spent the last two months doing exactly that and have learned a number of things about networking. Here are a few tips and comments for those of you who want to network to generate business.

Develop a Relationship Rather Than Try to Make a Quick Sale

The single biggest secret to successful business generation is to develop a relationship with your target audience. This requires follow up after meeting a person at an event and following through with a plan to meet a few times and get to know the person. If you think you can attend networking events, hand out business cards and expect people to pay for your service or refer people to you, you are mistaken. It does not work that way and most people you give your business cards to will never ever use them. When was the last time you referred someone that you only met once at networking event? I for one would tell a friend to look in the phonebook or search the Internet rather than refer them to someone I just met. Here is a good example. The other week a friend asked me if I knew a good accountant and I ran into someone at an event who claimed to be an accountant (actually he was a sales person that generated business and sent interested parties to the real accountants). I of course did not refer my friend to him and would rather tell my friend to look in the phone book than put my reputation on the line referring someone that I have had a 3 minutes conversation with. To conclude, effective business generation at a networking event occurs with a follow up call, a meeting and interactions between the parties over a period of time to develop a relationship and foster trust. Yes, this takes time but I have found this approach is very effective.

Focus on the Pitch

At one of my networking groups we are required to do a thirty second pitch to the group where we summarize who we are, what we do and how we can help the rest of the group. This activity is excellent for refining your pitch and establishing a clear concise message is extremely important. I am often surprised when I go to networking events and I ask someone what they do and after a 2 minute description I do not have a clue what they do for a living or how I could fit into the reason they are at the event. Keep in mind that people lose interest after a very short

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period of time and they are not necessarily going to further engage with you if they are bored. Moreover, they certainly will not ask you to explain jargon, abbreviations or complex terms. Keep it simple and engaging.

Carefully Select Your Events

There are different types of networking events so you should ask someone who has attended a particular event what the event will be like. While your goal may be to generate business, there are a myriad of reasons other people attend these events. Some attend because they have the goal of finding a wife or a husband. Others see the networking events as more of a social outing (almost like going to a bar). Others may just want to get out and meet people for the sake of it and do not even take business cards with them. You will also find that some events are full of used car sales people who wish to sell products, like water filters or web design services, and who start conversations with a version of “can I get your credit card number.” While all of these reasons for attending networking events are valid, many of them do not go a long way towards your goal of generating business. In conclusion it is important to carefully select your networking events so that you are attending events of like minded people as quite frankly some events are a waste of time.

Respond When People Write to You

If you go to an event and someone sends you an email you should respond. You do not have to become good friends or even do business with them but generally an acknowledgment of the email is proper etiquette. As I write this I feel that it is so obvious that everyone should know this but I am often surprised how many people do not do this. If your strategy is to make a whirlwind appearance at an event, throw your business cards in the air and hope that one sticks to someone you may be better off staying at home.

I met a Real Estate lawyer at a networking event and I sent him a follow up “nice meeting you” message that he did not ever respond to. I do not know any other real estate lawyers but I certainly would not ever refer anyone to that lawyer. (I kept his card to make sure of this) I went to lunch with another lawyer who I met at the same event and he too mentioned that he wrote to that lawyer after the event and he did not write back. That lawyer actually remembered his name and was equally put off.

In my opinion, when you fail to respond, you are actually in a worse position than if you did not attend the event as bad form leaves a bad taste in the mouth and your reputation is very important. I had another non-responder who was an employment lawyer and since I met him, I have had 4 different people ask me for an employment law referral. I could honestly respond to all of them that I did not know one.

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Keep Your Business Cards Separate From the Ones You get & Take a Pen to the Event and Make Notes

When I attended my first networking event I encountered a number of logistical problems. For example, I had a card holder where it was difficult to get cards out, I mixed together cards I received with my own cards, I ran out of cards & later when I looked at the cards I did not remember some of the people that gave them to me. For my second event, I quickly remedied these problems. First, I bought a card holder where it was easy to dispense cards. Second, I kept a large number of my cards in my right pocket and put cards I received in my left pocket. Third, I brought a pen with me and wrote something identifiable on the cards where I had an interest in the person who gave it to me. These simple tips made my next several networking events run very smoothly and made it easy to connect with the people that I wanted to connect with.

When you Get Home Separate Your Cards into Piles

Go with your gut with respect to the people you meet and divide the cards you receive into piles when you get home. I divide into three piles. 1) A complete waste of time pile; 2) I want to build a relationship with this person because I may be able to refer clients to the person and the person may be able to refer to me; & 3) This person wanted my legal services & is a potential client pile. While I send emails to everyone I meet and add them on LinkedIn, I focus on the second two piles and set up meetings or send out promotional material accordingly. For example, I just had lunch with a very pleasant bank branch manager where a mutually beneficial relationship could be established. Also at some of these events I have met people who have expressed an interest in a particular service that I offer so I send them an article that I have written on the topic or a link to the relevant part of my website. Establishing these types of relationships has been a great mutually beneficial business generator.

Sign up for Free Events Quickly As Good Free Events “Sell Out” Fast

The word spreads fast about effective business generation events and this is especially the case for free events. As such, if an event is free you should sign up immediately. I have encountered numerous situations where I signed up for an event and later when a friend attempted to sign up there were no more slots available. If an event is free, you can always sign up and then decide about attending later so you really do not have anything to lose. Remember to cancel if you decide not to go so that others will have a shot.

No Jokes, No Insults & Do Not Drink Excessively

You may think you are funny but others may not. You should of course be engaging but save your jokes for amateur stand up comedy night. I am shocked at how inappropriate some people are at these events. The other night I went to an Ivy Life event at the Princeton club and a woman made extremely offensive comments about India (in front of a person from India). Her

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comments focused around her recent visit to India where she compared the different groups in India to war like African tribal factions. (Yes, all 100% true)

Conversation at these events should be kept light and should avoid politics, religion, race or any other highly controversial topic. Some should also try to be a bit more socially and culturally sensitive as at the end of the day you will not get clients if you offend them. I for one would never use the services of that woman who made the offensive comments.

While anecdotal, I have found that I do not see as much of this type of behavior at breakfast networking events and I can only conclude that alcohol contributes to the inappropriate behavior. That leads us to our last point on this topic which is to watch your drinking. While many like to have a nice stiff drink now and then, you would be well served to limit or eliminate drinking alcohol during networking events. While you may be able to hold your liquor, your best foot will not be put forward if you are tipsy (or drunk) or come across as anything less than professional.

For more information on Networking or legal services in Immigration, New Business, Contracts, Estate Planning or Surrogacy, contact [Scott Legal Services, P.C.](#). Call 212-223-2964 or email iscott@legalservicesincorporated.com for a free consultation.