

Are You Making These Networking Mistakes?

Contributed by Pat Wiklund
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{bot_wrgoogle}Beware of poking a hole in your net as you increase your networking. Make sure you don't make these mistakes in your zeal to sell yourself.

ASKING WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR ME...ON FIRST MEETING. I watched as a young woman was introduced to three colleagues. In a flash, she realized one of her new acquaintances was a close personal friend of a business owner she had been unsuccessful in selling on her services. She quickly asked for a reference and introduction to the business owner. When her new acquaintance demurred, she insisted that the other woman had to do it. "That's what networking is all about."

Her error? She assumed an introduction brought the right to ask for referrals from strangers. Most people won't refer someone they don't know or when they don't know a person's work.

INUNDATING NEW CONTACTS WITH SALES MATERIALS. After a brief conversation at a banquet one evening, I started getting masses of sales solicitations from a man who obviously didn't know me, my business, my needs or even where I lived. Most of the solicitations were for very expensive, multiple day seminars in eastern cities on topics I'd never need.

His error? Assuming I'd use his services, without finding out what I needed. And then battering me to use him. Here's the strange part. Some of my clients could use him. But, I'd never refer them and subject them to his aggressive sales methods.

ASKING WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR ME...ON EVERY MEETING. A colleague who does complementary work to mine will never get a referral from me. Nor will I ever use her as a subcontractor. The cause: every time I talk with her she asks me if I have work for her. Her request is always delivered with a tone of voice that's close to begging and over the edge of whining. It's as if when I have work, I somehow owe her some of it.

Her error? Asking, asking, asking. Implying I have an obligation to use her.

GETTING TOO PERSONAL. I received a "personal" note, obviously mass produced, with my name spelled wrong, referring to a group I'd never heard of, suggesting how I could use the author in my business. Since then, I've heard of this person from two other colleagues. They seem impressed with his work. Even their positive experiences aren't enough to take the bad taste out of my mouth.

His error? Excuse me! There is something about integrity that's missing here. Don't presume a relationship that doesn't exist. I would have rather have gotten an honest cold call.

CALLS FROM PERFECT STRANGERS. This one really astounded me. I got a phone call one afternoon asking me if I were really the Pat Wiklund who had been on Oprah twice...did she really call me to be on the show? When I said yes, the voice on the phone identified herself, said she was a friend of a friend, and she wanted to be on Oprah and would I tell her the name and phone numbers of the producers I worked with so she could get on the show. I was dumbfounded. Although I had heard of her, I knew nothing of her work, what she had written, and barely knew the "friend" that had referred me to her. When I said as much, and my policy was to only refer people when I knew their work, she said I had to give her the names...that's what networking was all about.

Her error? Here goes the assumption again. I don't think I have an obligation to facilitate the marketing and/or career of everyone who has just heard my name. I owe to my contacts, and to myself, to be careful who and how I refer.

REMEMBER:a Most people won't refer someone they don't know or when they don't know a person's work. Referrals carry an obligation. You're vouching for the other person. Referrals come when colleagues know they can trust you. They are earned, not assumed, Earn the right to ask for a referral by establishing a relationship with colleagues. Let them get to know you and your work. Understand who your colleagues are, and how you can reciprocate.

Pat Wiklund is known as the One-Person Business Turnaround Specialist. She works with professional services business owners so they can make more money and get more personal satisfaction from their work. Start taking charge of your business and your life with her One-Person Business Tune-Up mini e-course by sending a blank email to tuneup@1PersonBusiness.com

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