



Make contacts and develop business

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***Helping you make key business connections
and develop them into clients and referral sources...***

EFFECTIVE FOLLOW-UP FOR SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS NETWORKING — PART ONE

— by Ron Gibson

Okay, so you've met some new people who could potentially be your clients or customers or who could refer business to you. Maybe you've done this by way of chance meetings or non-business occasions or possibly during a Chamber of Commerce function, conference or other organised event. You've made a great positive first impression on those you've met and you've got their business cards. This is good but, what's next?

***A lot of networking isn't in making contacts,
but following them up and developing them.***

Now you need to communicate with your new acquaintances via e-mail, phone or postal mail within the next two or three days to follow up. Your goal here is to solidify your new connections — you want to reinforce the positive first impression you made on those people and be remembered. This is **NOT** the time to be selling anything. Nothing will put a person off faster than sending them your prospecting letter or marketing materials right after meeting them for the first time. If the person requested additional information about your business, send it under separate cover. Let your follow-up communication stand on its own as a true "thankyou for...", "glad to meet you" or "great chatting with you". The idea is for you to be friendly not salesy.

You need to build a measure of trust and confidence before trying to sell.

The people you meet at networking events and the like are there as equals. They do not want to be sold to and they definitely do not want to be treated as "prospects". Any attempt to sell your wares when following up with a fresh new networking contact will likely forever doom any potential relationship as you will be someone to avoid. The same goes for asking for big favours too soon. Wait until you have established a more solid connection. Minor requests such as the name of a good insurance broker or financial adviser aren't generally a problem. However, larger requests such as a referral or introduction to a decision maker in their firm or access to their clients should wait. Very few people are willing to risk their professional reputation for someone they have only recently met.

***While networking is an excellent way to build your
client base and your business, leaving the sales pitch or request
for a big favour out of your initial follow up will advance the relationship further, faster.***

Following up is a critical discipline that is an essential part of successful business networking. It's how you go from meeting someone for the first time to begin developing a relationship as a source of business or of referrals and market information. Following up is foundational to inducting those good connections you make into your personal business network. It is the key to becoming well-connected and a trusted, go-to expert in your field.

You don't want to waste time and effort put into making new business contacts by neglecting to follow up with them.

When you don't follow up, you're dropping the ball — a very expensive one at that. Why go to all the effort to meet new people and then throw away any potential opportunities by ignoring them afterwards? When you're building a business, a client base or a sales pipeline, you have a tremendous responsibility for getting a relationship started once you make that first contact.

Not following up costs you gaining new clients and referral sources, holding back the growth of your business. Not following up makes it unlikely that your networking contacts will remember you when they cross paths with someone who could use your product or service. Not following up hurts your reputation.

Nothing, absolutely nothing, is likely to come of all your efforts to meet new people if you don't follow up.

Despite all of this, most people do not follow up with their new contacts. It's almost as if they are expecting everyone to follow up with **them**. It's simply not true that someone will "call you when they need what you sell" or "refer business your way when the opportunity arises". The truth is, that if they have met you only once they probably don't even remember you, let alone remember where they put your business card.

Follow up or be forgotten! Memories fade by the demands of busy schedules and hectic lives even after you made a great first impression. After a week or two, you can consider yourself lucky to be remembered at all.

Sometimes people say, I didn't have time to follow up — I was "too busy" when I got back to the office. As mentioned earlier, by not following up with those good connections you've made, you're dropping the ball. To say you're too busy to develop relationships is business suicide. Perhaps a little planning can help. After you mark your diary with the event you want to attend, do one more thing. Put time in your diary the day after your event to follow up and then do it.

Even if your busy schedule/workload precludes you from taking on fresh clients right now and your business pipeline is filled for months ahead, following up keeps the "connection" alive and the door open for future potential communication when you might be looking for more business.

Perhaps you're thinking, follow-up is a painful exercise. It can be — if your follow-ups don't bring you the response (results) you're expecting. Understanding the problem here is the start of making follow-up work for you. If people you are trying to reconnect with are not responding to your e-mails, if they're not taking your calls or calling you back, then it's likely to be for one or a combination of the following reasons:

- **You didn't build a good measure of trust and rapport with your new contact when you first spent time with them.** You'll need to go back to basics. Take a few minutes to read my articles entitled "HOW TO SKILFULLY CONVERSE WITH PEOPLE" and "ENGAGING DURING THE CONVERSATION". People will reciprocate and respond to your follow ups after they have met you if they warmed to you. Focus on building the "like you, trust you, feel comfortable with you" factor when you meet people for the first time.
- **Your new contact may not see value in fostering a relationship with you.** If your new contact sees you only as a seller of a specific product/service/solution and does not want what you have to sell right now, then she/he has no real reason to respond to your follow-up.

The most important concept that will allow you to develop relationships that lead to future business is to understand that you can provide value to others WITHOUT selling them your wares. You are not following up properly (effectively) if you are not including something of value to the other party. You see an important part of networking is to find reasons to re-connect with people after an initial meeting. The best way to do this is to find some small favour that you can do for them that obliges you to follow them up. What the favour is doesn't matter as long as it's something the person wants/will value. It can be a certain piece of information that relates back to the conversation you had, a book reference, a website, a referral to a business contact, a sales lead or the name of a good restaurant. Next time, remember this: people will respond to your follow-ups if you are helpful to them in some meaningful way. Just know that the receiver determines whether the favour is helpful, not the giver.

You'll create greater trust and more business opportunities if you believe one simple concept. By focussing on how you can help others succeed and prosper, you contribute to their success as well as your own.

When you're talking with clients and contacts, ask questions and listen carefully to find out what they want to accomplish and what their challenges are — and make it your business to help them.

Back to reasons why people don't respond to your follow-ups...

- **Your business proposition (aka why your new contact should do business with you and refer business to you) is not clear.** Could your new contacts articulate what you do, what you specialise in and the value you create for your clients? If your business proposition is clear, people will see the benefit in fostering a relationship with you. Work on improving your business proposition so that when people ask you "what do you do?" your answer helps them see the value you bring to the table via your product, service or solution.
- **Your soft skills need polishing.** Communication skills, interpersonal skills, people skills. Call it what you like, but if people don't warm to you then you're unlikely to get their business or referrals. If your soft skills aren't working for you, read Dale Carnegie, Napoleon Hill, Stephen Covey and Les Giblin.

- **You are not meeting enough (of the right) people.** How often do you get out to meet new people? Are you taking on active roles in organisations or just showing up? What is your networking plan to initiate and develop those connections into business relationships? If you want to grow your business from networking, you need to be consistently interacting with people who are your ideal clients, know your ideal clients and/or do business with your ideal clients. Go fishing (regularly) where the fish are. So before you sign up for your next networking event or join that networking group, ask yourself if it is a good fit for your business.

Here's a few more follow-up ideas to help you build on the momentum of meeting someone for the first time to reinforce the great positive impression you made and begin building relationships that will lead either to business or referral business.

- Set the foundation for follow-up while you're talking. Follow-up starts during the initial encounter. As you're talking, be looking for something to say in your follow-up communication. As soon as it hits you make a mental note of it immediately after the meeting (while the conversation is still fresh in your mind) make a note of it on the back of the person's business card. Do not write on your new contact's business card while she/he is right there in front of you — this is considered to be very rude by some people.
- When following up with new contacts, a generic "nice to meet you" won't cut it. You need to make it personal by referring back to parts of the conversation you had.
- Be prompt. A quick follow up (within 48 hours) guarantees that your new contact will remember you and the conversation you shared together. The conversation will still be fresh in your mind too, making it easy for you to find the appropriate words to say. If you wait longer than 3 days, you risk not following up at all.
- Remember, the primary purpose of follow up is for relationship building and not selling or promoting your product or service. Don't include pamphlets, brochures or other information about your business — it comes off as pushy and appears that your only interest in them is making a sale. As you develop your relationship, you will have plenty of opportunities to talk about business in depth.
- I meet so many people who simply turn up at networking events and collect cards and then mail/email their brochure the next day saying "buy from me". This is NOT networking — it's selling! Sure you want to build your business, but this is entirely the wrong approach — and it doesn't work.
- Not everyone will reciprocate and respond to your follow-up attempts. For whatever reason, they may not see the value in fostering a relationship. I suggest you try to reconnect no more than 3 times using at least 2 different methods — postal mail, email or phone. After that, let time pass and the opportunity to meet again may come.
- Which method? Everyone likes to get mail. By dropping a hand-written note or card to someone along with a brief article about the topic you discussed, you will make a long-lasting impression. So few people take the time to write notes today, your gesture will be unforgettable. Postal mail should always be the way to follow up with your highest priority contacts. Use phone calls when you want to convey a personal touch. Over the phone, you can pick up on the conversation where you left off, you can find something in common, you can learn something new about the person and you can very quickly

arrange a time to meet for a longer chat over lunch or coffee. Use email for a quick note or when time is of the essence — it's convenient, immediate and can be used almost anywhere. But email doesn't stand out the way a hand-written note will. And it won't convey your warmth, energy and sincerity the way a phone call might. What's more, with so much email landing in inboxes, you risk getting lost in the crowd. That said, email does have its place — but just don't rely solely on it. If you have something important to say, use postal mail or a phone call to get your message across.

Follow up immediately. If too much time passes before you follow up, the conversation may slip into the recesses of the person's mind or blur with that of someone else she/he met recently and it won't have as strong an impact.

- By listening and paying attention to what others tell you and by asking good questions you will discover ways (the words to use) to follow up with people you meet.

Follow up immediately while you still remember what you talked about.

- You're not following up with potential clients and referral sources properly if you're not including something of interest or value. Consider the following ideas:
 - Invite your new contact to an internal event, award event, industry event or an event where you are the speaker.
 - Let your contact know of any speaking engagements for which she/he may be suitable or ask him/her to be a speaker at your event.
 - Send your contact an article that is relevant to his/her specialisation and industry.
 - Send articles about other "value items", case studies, thought leadership materials, fact-finding items and other relevant business publications — extra special if you do it by postal mail and include a hand-written note.
 - Introduce your new contacts to members of your network who can help their business grow.
 - Become a champion of one of their causes.
 - Suggest lunch, coffee or beers to get to know each other better.
 - Point out a helpful website or provide a book reference or clarification of some technical issue you discussed.
- When you first start networking, it is useful to follow up with most of the people you meet as they might be able to connect you to others who can help your business grow. However, as time progresses you can narrow your focus and spend more time following up those people who are most likely to result in business or business referrals. That said, you can't always tell who will or won't become a client or referral source, so if you have the time (or want to make the time) it is a good idea to follow up with all the new contacts you make.

Never add anyone to your database unless they have given you permission.

- Personalising your follow up speaks volumes that you were actually listening and paying attention to what someone was saying. Include in your follow up something specific to the conversation you had with the person at the event/meeting. Many people do not follow up because they have nothing to say that builds on the initial conversation — because there was no **real** conversation! They did not learn anything they could use to build on, they didn't pick up on anything they could do to be helpful to their new contact either business wise or in a personal way.
- Have a small notepad and a pen with you (at all times) to jot down any particulars about the conversations you have with people. Your notes can be helpful reminders for follow-ups later. Just don't make notes while the person is standing in front of you. Instead, wait until the conversation has ended and you have moved on.
- When you meet someone interesting at an event and you think there is a potential relationship to be had, establish a reason while you're in conversation together to follow up after the event. It's always easier to make the follow-up call or send the follow-up email if you know your new contact is expecting it. The reason for following up might be to set up an in-person meeting or talk on the phone.

...end of PART ONE.

Read PART TWO of "EFFECTIVE FOLLOW-UP FOR SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS NETWORKING" for more detailed advice on effective follow-up and how to successfully manage the conversation when your follow-up results in an in-person, face-to-face second meeting.

Ron Gibson runs training programmes, provides one-on-one mentoring and conducts public and corporate seminars on building business through networking, referrals and word of mouth. Get Ron to speak to your people about how to bring in more business, more consistently and more often. Call Ron on 0413 420 538 or email gonetworking@iinet.net.au.