



15 Keep-it-Simple Tips for B2B Networkers

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My Pinnacle Network
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Intro

My Pinnacle Network began in 2012 as a resource for B2B professionals and small business owners to meet, learn about each other and then hopefully pass leads and referrals. A great part of that effort has been our weekly e-newsletter. In addition to sharing meeting times and locations, we've tried to impart some of our collective wisdom on the skill and art—it can be both—of networking.

This e-book contains some of the better e-newsletter columns we have posted over the years. We're not reinventing the wheel here. Not by a long shot. In fact, the best networkers will tell you the most effective things they do are the basics—listening, follow up—thrown in with a few of their own nuances. This book simply reminds us all to keep-it-simple, stick to those basics and grow your network.

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Is your networking meeting on your calendar?

If you are in a networking group, is your networking meeting on your calendar? If so, for how many weeks/months in advance? A month? Two months? Or is it marked for the rest of the calendar year and beyond?

What can often happen when people join a networking group is that a certain complacency can set in. The meeting becomes part of your routine. While in some ways routine is good, in networking not so much. Particularly, if you are in a monthly group.

As a member of a group that meets monthly that meeting should be more like an event. Most people don't want to miss events. That's why they mark events on their calendars, so they won't miss them and won't schedule anything at that particular time.

While it may seem like a small thing, marking your calendar with your networking meetings for several months in advance symbolically represents a commitment to that group. A commitment you've reinforced by putting it to paper or, in most cases, a calendar item on your handheld or computer.

Does that mean you make every meeting? Not necessarily. Life events still happen. Yet it's probably safe to say the networker who books their networking meetings and events in their calendar well in advance will make it there more times than one who doesn't. And in networking, being there is more than half the battle.

Who's the best networker you know?

That's probably a question you have never been asked or even thought about. We are asking you now. Specifically what do they do that makes them a great networker? Do you know? Have you ever asked them? Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but it also provides a lit pathway to success if you are willing to follow.

So, here's an exercise for you if you want to grow as a networker. Target one or two of the best networkers you know. Invite them to have a one-on-one. Then, instead of asking about their business, ask for one or two tips on how they go about networking.

If that feels a little awkward, drop them a note first to let them know what you're interest in. Say something like:

"Dear ___,

I consider you to be one of the best networkers I know. Would you be willing to take a minute or two on the phone or maybe grab a cup of coffee to discuss your approach to networking? I'd really appreciate it..."

You would be surprised how responsive people will be to such requests. Why? Because good networkers know that the most critical component to networking is effort. If you're putting forth the effort to seek their guidance to grow your network, it actually will help grow their network even more. And that's when networking is a win for everybody.

Think about the referrals you have passed. What was the genesis of that referral? It involved your listening skills more than anything else.

It's not who you know, but what you hear

First, you probably heard a friend, colleague or peer talk about his or her business what their needs. If you were truly listening, that registered in your memory on a certain level.

Next, in your travels, be it at your place of business, networking group, coffee shop, etc., you heard somebody express a need for a certain product or service. You interject and say, "I know somebody who might be able to help you...". And that is how a lead/referral is born.

So, if you're in a networking group and you're wondering why you have not received a referral, perhaps you're not asking the right question. Maybe you should be asking, why have I not passed a referral?

Clearly there are exceptions to this rule, but when it comes to referrals you have to give to receive. And the only way you can give is to know what people want or need. That, you can only do by listening.

There's probably not one of us who paid attention to every single word every person has said at a networking meeting. We should, but we don't. Fortunately, it's an area where you can improve quite easily.

Make it a point to listen at your next networking meeting. Bring a notebook and be sure to write down at least one type of referral for each member requests as they give their elevator pitch. You would be surprised how much registers in your memory when you put it in writing. From there, all you really have to do is listen.

There are books, blogs any number of resources out there to tell you how to be a better networker. None of those networking techniques will mean much unless you follow up in a timely manner with the people you meet.

Networking success – It's all in the follow through

There's really no correct way to follow up. E-mail, phone call, snail mail, tweet, text, you name it. What does matter is conducting that follow-up in a timely manner. The typical guideline for follow-up is within two business days.

While timeliness is a key component, so is what you say. "A nice meeting you" note is fine, but will it leave much of an impression? Probably not.

In your follow-up, mention a topic you discussed with the person. If you talked about their business and some particular issue they were having, reference that. You don't necessarily need to solve the problem but it's important to get across that you were listening and took an interest. The very last thing you want to do is follow up and have the person on the receiving end feel like you only followed up because you want their business.

One easy, unforced way to follow up with people you meet at a networking event is to ask if it's okay to put them on your mailing list (if you have a company newsletter). This accomplishes a couple of things. First, it's a fairly easy thing to do (e.g. "it was nice meeting you at the ___, would you mind terribly if I put you on our mailing list so we can keep in touch). Second, it shows consideration of their needs and not wanting to add yet another unwanted e-mail to their inbox. Nine times out of 10, they will respond favorably to that kind of request and your connection is now made.

The secret killer of networking groups

Last week's topic discussing the correlation between gratitude in elevator pitches and success in networking groups struck a real chord with readers. This week's topic is essentially the opposite of gratitude: resentment. And it can be a death sentence to not only leads, but can cast a cloud over an entire networking group.

If you have been in a networking group for any length of time and done your share of one-on-ones, you might hear grumblings from fellow members about certain members not passing them business. These grumblings can get even louder if your fellow member has passed leads to the member they are complaining about. As somebody who has a vested interest in the overall success of your networking group, it's your job to get your fellow member off the "whine without the cheese".

That's not saying they might not have a beef. Yet complaining about somebody not passing referrals never solved the problem. If anything, it creates an animosity that casts a cloud over your group and makes others uncomfortable—and that diminishes the effectiveness of the group.

So, what do you do? Whether it's you feeling this way or a fellow group member, suggest taking a good look in the mirror and asking a few questions:

The secret killer of networking groups

- Have I done a one-on-one with this person (you'd be surprised how many people expect referrals without having sat down with said person)?
- Did I present myself in a way that makes me easy to refer? Sometimes preparing a list of people you're looking to be referred to and a list of how you can help them makes it much easier to pass a referral.
- If you have passed your fellow networking group member a lead did you take following steps:
 - Contact the lead to let them know somebody from your networking group would be reaching out to them?
 - Did you follow up with your fellow group member to see whether they connected with your referral and whether or not it was the right kind of referral?
 - Follow up with the referral.

If you go through this series of questions and come up with blank, set up another one-on-one with your fellow networking member (you can do as many of those as you need, there is no limit). Be direct, but without being accusatory or hostile. For example, you might say:

"I was hoping we'd be good sources of leads and referrals for each other. Is there anything you can tell me about your business that might help me pass more referrals your way?"

Granted, this is not really addressing the problem. But once they answer that question, most people will reciprocate and ask how they can help you. That should lead to a discussion that will get you an answer. Nine times out of 10, the answer will not be directly about you, but something about them.

The networker you know

What you really want to get out of this exercise is an answer that can cease the resentment. A good rule of thumb in life and networking groups—if you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all. Grumbling about what you're not getting from other group members typically makes you look as bad as the person you're complaining about. And the last thing you want is that frustration giving other members of your group a reason to hesitate in passing referrals to you, too.

When searching for a networking group, many people seek out groups where they don't know any of the members, the logic being why network with people you already know. Knowing at least a few people in a networking group is precisely what you DO want for any number of reasons.

First, a familiar face or two makes your transition into any group smoother, particularly if the people you know have established relationships with others in the group. So, when setting up 1-1's you're not "the new guy" but the "friend of John/Jane". And that can be enough of an icebreaker to develop your own relationships within the group.

That's one obvious advantage of knowing people before you enter a networking group. Another is getting to know your friend/acquaintance better because you are now in a networking group with them. Maybe there's a service they have recently added since the last time you talked? Perhaps you didn't know they went to a certain college or worked at that company before going into business on their own?

Transforming a cold lead into a warm referral

When you join a networking group, you want to hit the ground running and get to know people in your group as quickly as possible. Especially the folks in your sphere of influence. By knowing people in an existing group, you have insights that you wouldn't otherwise have had you not known anyone.

So, you do a one-on-one with somebody from your networking group and he/she gives you a lead. Now what?

That depends largely on the information provided. As a practice, you want to try and get a phone number and an e-mail address. In fact, e-mail is often an easier ice-breaker to introduce yourself and the connection to person providing the lead.

Once you have the lead's contact info, the follow-up process should start before you end your one-on-one meeting:

Honesty, a networking priority

- **Confirm next steps** – Will the person who gave you the lead reach out to that person? If so, by when. Offer to make the initial introduction to the lead via e-mail. Mention you met with John/Jane Doe from your networking group and they suggested we should connect. Be sure to cc John/Jane on the e-mail.
- **Let it breathe** – Don't expect an immediate response, particularly if the lead hasn't heard from Jane/John about you. Give it two business days before taking the next step.
- **Call the lead** – Again, reference John/Jane and how they thought it would be beneficial for the two of you to connect. Be sure to reference the e-mail you sent and that you are just following up. Hopefully, the discussion takes its course and you can set up a meeting.
- **Follow up with your networking member** – Let Jane/John know if you connected with their lead. If more than a week goes by and you haven't been able to connect, let them know that as well.

When somebody gives you a lead, there's a responsibility of follow-up that falls on both of you. Otherwise, it's a cold lead, which is just one notch above a cold call—and that goes against the grain of why we join networking groups.

Know that when you give or get a lead, it's going to require effort from both parties to make it a warm referral. Be prepared to do the follow-up to make that happen.

Did George Washington really say, "I cannot tell a lie..." when asked whether he cut down the cherry tree? Whether he did or not is probably not important as important as the message itself. And it's a great motto to take into your one-on-one networking sessions—honesty.

In networking and in love, it's the thought that counts

That's not to say that people lie while networking. But it's fairly safe to say some networkers are prone to exaggeration when it comes to talking about their company's capabilities. For example, the website designer claiming to be an SEO expert, when in fact it's a service they farm out. Not that there is anything wrong with offering a service that you don't actually do. Just be up-front about that.

When somebody refers business to you it's more than your reputation on the line. It's theirs too. Overpromising on what you can deliver puts several relationships at risk.

Lead and referral passing is supposed to be a win for all—the person who gets the business, the person who passes the referral, and the business who benefits from getting services from a trusted source rather than having to do an extensive search on their own. By maintaining an "honesty is the best and only" policy, you ensure that win for everyone and earn trust for future referrals down the road.

Ordering flowers for your sweetie for Valentine's Day seems like a slam dunk/no-brainer and an easy way to get in good graces with your better half. Yet if those flowers have a generic card with little or no sentiment, you can see why the gift may not be as well received. The same can go with networking.

During the course of a one-on-one, if you're listening closely, you may think of people who can help your fellow networker. Well intentioned, you give your fellow networker a phone number or e-mail address and say, "Call/write Bill and tell him you know me". Unfortunately, this can be a dead end for a number of leads and the reason why is very similar to the Valentine's Day flowers: it lacks your full participation.

Want to be a better networking group member? Be more social.

If there's someone in your address book who you think would be a good lead for somebody in your networking group, go one step further. Make the introduction yourself. While it may not be practical to do so in person, an e-mail introducing your fellow networker and your contact adds a seal of approval.

"Bill, I'd like to introduce you to somebody from my networking group. He's in the ___ business. I thought you two might be able to help each other out. I've cc'ed him on this e-mail so he can reach out to you directly."

Does this guarantee a successful referral? Not necessarily. But what it does is take a cold lead and warm it up a bit so that when you do reach out to the lead, they are not blindsided. And the further you are from a cold call, the more effective your networking efforts will be.

If you're in a networking group, there is no substitute for a one-on-one meeting. In addition to first-hand information about your fellow group member's business, you invariably learn a bit about them as a person and that can make it easier to connect them to potential leads and referrals. But there is one thing every person in a networking group should be doing in addition to one-on-one meetings and that's being more social—social media, that is.

If your fellow networker has a Facebook page, like it.

If they have a Twitter page, follow it.

A LinkedIn profile, connect.

Finally, if they have an e-newsletter, sign up for it.

In networking, it's who you don't know

This will not take the place of a one-on-one, but will provide you some background information beforehand and enable you to stay current with what's going on with them afterwards.

And if your group has its own social media presence—like My Pinnacle Network—do the same as above. Also, get in the habit of posting your social media posts to their social media pages.

A common complaint frustrated networkers voice is about not receiving leads or referrals. That can be a valid complaint, but on your end, you have to make sure you are doing everything in your power to make it easier to refer you. Making your networking group part of your social media efforts can be a great way to stay front-of-mind with your fellow networker.

“It's not what you know, but who you know.” How many times have you heard that in business and in the course of everyday life? Yet when it comes to networking, it's who you don't know that dictates your level of success.

What that means is many business owners attend networking meetings or functions with the intent of networking to find people with whom they can share leads, referrals and perhaps even do business. Yet how many times do you find yourself at a networking meeting spending most of your time to somebody you already know fairly well?

That's not to downplay reconnecting with business owners you have a relationship with. Those kind of events can help that relationship evolve. Yet the primary goal of attending a networking event or meeting is also expanding your network. You can't do that by only talking to people you already know.

Person-to-person networking. Leave a paper trail.

So, when you're attending a networking meeting or function, make a point to introduce yourself to visitors or people you have not met. If you are in the middle of a conversation with somebody who is part of your network, encourage them to walk over and introduce yourself to people neither of you know. A lot of times it will be easier to break the ice if two people approach a newcomer to a meeting or function rather than just one person.

As you approach new people at a networking , do so with a time limit in mind. Ask them about their business and who their customers are. Find out about where they're from. Ask if they know people that you know from that same town. If there's somebody there you think they should meet, find that person and invite them over to continue the conversation.

This is not to say that people who are new to a networking group should not be making that first step to mingle and get around. They absolutely should. But even if somebody's networking skills aren't up to where they could or should be, it doesn't mean they might not be a great source of leads/referrals or business. So, make that little effort to break away from the people you know to meet business owners you don't. You literally have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

One the more important things you can do in developing a network is conduct one-on-one meetings. After all, what better way is there to get to know somebody and learn about their business than meet face-to-face? But what happens after the meeting? How confident are you that the person you just met with has a handle on what your business is all about and who your best prospects are? One way to ensure networking success is to have at least one article you can pass on to your network that they, in turn, can use to reference your business.

Person-to-person networking. Leave a paper trail. – My Pinnacle Network

You might be saying, “we haven’t received any coverage in the press that really describes our company well enough”. Even if the press hasn’t covered your business, that doesn’t prohibit you from writing an article about what it is you do.

For example, if you’re a CPA, you could write an article on “The Top 10 Reasons Small Businesses Get Audited by the Government”. Or if you’re a web designer, you could write an article entitled, “The Top 10 Things to Look for in a Web Design Firm”.

You’re probably noticing a pattern with the “top 10” theme but that’s strictly to address the reason many entrepreneurs have for not having a prepared article that describes their company, “I can’t write”. Poppycock!

If writing is not your thing, that’s one thing. But you should be able to talk about the 10 best ways to work with a ___ or the 10 things you should look for in a ___. Even if you have to say it into a tape recorder first, you can communicate that. Then, it’s really a matter of finding somebody who can take that information and make it read well. And there are many resources to find freelance copywriters or firms that can do that.

Once the article is written, with your name and bio included as the byline, you’ll want to publish it somewhere to make it look official. There are hundreds of free article submission sites who are desperate for content from subject matter experts. Ezinearticles.com is one. It really then becomes a matter of submitting your article and waiting for it to be available online.

Be a better networker TODAY

Once your article is online, you now have a tool to share with your network. You can print it out with the masthead from the publication to make it really look official. Or, you can forward the link so your network can e-mail it to potential prospects. The recommendation here is to print it out—keep it to one page if you can—and hand it to your network as you conduct one-on-one meetings.

One thing you'll find about networking is that it places a premium on your collateral marketing materials. How well those pieces describe what you do gives your network the ammunition to generate leads for you. So even if your company brochure or website aren't up to snuff, a bylined article can give your network all it needs to trumpet your capabilities.

And that's key to making your network work.

Everyone gets caught up in the craziness of work, family and other commitments. Invariably, some things fall through the cracks. For many, that's follow-up and follow-through with regard to your networking efforts. If that sounds like you, here's one piece of advice: today is a new day and it's not too late to follow-up.

As a rule, when you meet somebody at a networking function or conduct a one-on-one, it's good form to follow-up within three days. This may sound like a bit of a formality, but it really is another level of the networking process. Since your meeting, that person may have thought of somebody who might be a lead or referral source for you. A simple follow-up after your meeting keeps you front-of-mind.

Be a better networker TODAY – My Pinnacle Network

Now, if this is something you have been negligent on in the past, guess what? You can be a better networker today by simply making a phone call or dropping an e-mail to those you did not follow up with. Most people understand that everybody is busy and that some things do slide. A belated follow-up might rekindle the networking and lead to new business.

The most important thing about networking is consistency. Attend a certain number of events per month. Conduct X number of one-on-ones per month with people you meet at events or those who are part of your networking group. Then follow up with those individuals within three days. Yet perhaps as important as doing all those things is NOT beating yourself up too badly if you don't.

It may sound rather Pollyanna, pie-in-the-sky, but today is another day. You can spend that day being ticked off at yourself for not doing your follow-up or setting up one-on-ones or you can send out that follow-up note and apologize for not doing so sooner. Better yet, give that person a call. The fact is you can be a better networker today by forgiving yourself for what you should have done and taking action today. Simple as that.

Working your networking group for fun and profit

Networking isn't rocket science. It's common sense, common courtesy and bit of effort.

To get the most of any networking group, we suggest the following –

Show up early. Get there 15 minutes prior to start time. Show commitment and have a chance to connect with other early birds before the whirlwind of the meeting begins.

Tune in. Turn off your cell phone. Turn on your focus. Take notes on how you can help others.

Your turn to speak – differentiate. Client stories are more memorable and compelling than a punch list of your services. Tell a recent client story that underscores what you do well.

“How you can help me” – See the “how you can help me” outline on our website. This should include key phrases to listen for, the specific niche and demographic of your best prospects, best referral sources for you, the best way to introduce you.

Be genuine. Don't overstate your capabilities. Don't overpromise next steps.

Be a connector – Be the reference desk. Every connection has a ripple effect. Ripples lead to waves.

Working your networking group for fun and profit – My Pinnacle Network

Keep your antenna up? Look for opportunities for others. Listen for “hot buttons” for your colleagues.

Recruit members to strengthen the group – Who could add more energy and introductions to the group? Who do you know that seems to be everywhere, knows everyone? Encourage them to check out the group.

One-on-One meetings – Try to meet with each member of the group to create a more personal link and to better understand their business. Prepare for this meeting. See if you can bring one introduction to the meeting. Make it a “Rolodex” meeting. Bring your smartphone, laptop or tablet with your personal database information – conversation may lead to an immediate introduction.

Follow-up, follow-through. Respond to introductions within three working days. Show a sense of urgency and sincere interest.

Keep in touch. Make sure all group members are on your e-newsletter list, holiday list, business event/seminar list, etc.

Tom Hanks and “Thank you”

If that sounds like a Jeopardy clue, it really could be. The question would be, “what gets people to open an e-newsletter?” As the art of e-newslettering has evolved, it’s placed a great importance on your subject line. It really must be like a headline for an ad or newspaper story. And while it’s not terribly creative, “thank you” generally gets the most opens. But “thank you” may have a challenger: Tom Hanks.

A recent meme we reposted on Facebook had an extraordinary response from our network and beyond. So much so that we thought perhaps it could replace *thank you* as the most effective line. If you are reading this, you’re making this case.

When it comes to networking, the great Tom Hanks really can’t touch “thank you” for many reasons. First and foremost, *Joe and the Volcano*. But mostly because *thank you* is such a small gesture that means so much.

Yes, *thank you* is a show of gratitude and that’s also important. It’s also recognition of an effort made by somebody else. Regrettably, not as many people notice the things other people do. A *thank you* can go a long way towards deepening any relationship, but particularly a networking one.

Is there someone in your network that you should or could be thanking? Why not make that connection today? Sometimes those *thank yous* can turn into more—for no particular reason.

Tom Hanks and “Thank you”

Welcome to Designrr!

Speaking of *thank you*, thanks to you for reading our e-book. If you would like to learn more about My Pinnacle Network, please click on the button below and we'll get out some information regarding our groups and meeting dates and times. Please refer to our ebook in the subject line.

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