

## Checklist for More Successful Networking

by Kathy McAfee, Executive Presentation Coach

**Networking** is a strategic activity for building a successful career, business and personal life. My favorite definition of networking was inspired by Diane Darling, author of *The Networking Survival Guide*. She advocates that: **networking is the art of building and sustaining mutually beneficial relationships before you need them.** It's the "before" part that jumps out and grabs my attention. Don't defer networking to the times when you are looking for a job or trying to drum up new business. Instead, I invite you to view networking in a different light. Consider approaching your networking with this mindset:

1. If I want to grow my business and career through referrals and recommendations, networking must be one of my **key strategies, now and for the rest of my life.**
2. When I network, I'll **think relationships** not transactions; I'll **think conversation** not sales pitch.
3. When it comes to networking, my output is in direct proportion to my input. **If my input** includes my full energy, passion, good intention, follow-up, frequency, freely adding value and caring, **then my output** or outcome might include valuable referrals, recommendations, leads, friendship, reputation and new opportunity.
4. The true spirit of networking is **helping others and asking for help.** I must get good at working both sides of this equation.

**Here's a checklist** for more successful networking. It includes things to do before, during and after your networking encounter to ensure your ongoing success.

### Before Networking

- Give some thought to your **specific objectives** for this particular networking event. What do you hope to accomplish? Who would you like to meet? What would you like to learn? Remember, making a few meaningful connections is always better than a bunch of glancing blows.
- Practice your elevator pitch** or introductory statement. Remember, less is more. What single thing do you want people to remember about you? How can you make yourself relevant to them? How can you deliver your introduction in a way that attracts the right kind of contacts? Run your elevator pitch through the **MR. ABE criteria**: **M** stands for memorable; **R** stands for relatable; **A** stands for authentic; **B** stands for believable; **E** stands for engaging and energizing.
- Remember to bring an ample supply of your **business cards**. Bring a pen and paper to jot down notes.
- Chant the mantra repeatedly to yourself: What's Job #1? **Build Rapport!**
- Visualize Success.** Imagine how you'll feel fifteen minutes after the successful outcome of your networking meeting. Make the image really compelling, with sights, sounds, feelings.

## During Networking

- Turn off all electronic devices, including cell phones, Blackberries, laptops and pagers. Eliminate all distractions. Give your total attention to the other person. **Be fully present.**
- Start building rapport immediately.** If you are meeting face to face, mirror and match their physiology, including their stance, tilt of head, hand gestures, proximity, and eye blinks. Be as natural and authentic as possible. If you are networking over the phone, mirror and match their tonality, including the volume, pitch, speed and quality of their voice. Remember, when people are like each other, they like each other. Building rapport is always Job #1 in any networking situation.
- Ask open-ended questions. **Listen twice as much as you talk.** Find common ground. Pay close attention and gain information by observing their eye patterns and specific word choices.
- Think about who would make a good connection for this person. You can give value to other people not just by what you know and what you do. Your network, or who you know, is a valuable asset. **Become a connector of people.**
- Ask how you can help them,** and then when it's your turn, ask for what you need. Help each other.
- Be sure to **exchange business cards.** Ask for permission to stay in touch.

## After Networking

- Jot down personal information.** Write down on the back of their business card when and where you met, who connected you, key personal information, and any connections you promised.
- Update your database daily.** Take the time each day to record the contact details of the people you met in networking. Don't procrastinate and pile up business cards. Establish an on-line database or hire a virtual assistant to help you.
- The fortune is in the **follow-up.** I prefer the personal touch. Send a fun postcard or write a short personal note in your own handwriting. Check out [www.SendOutCards.com](http://www.SendOutCards.com) for a great system that's both efficient and personal. You can also send an email, but realize that most people are overwhelmed with too many emails and it may be more of a burden to receive it.
- Facilitate easy connections.** If you offered to connect them, send out an introductory email to both parties, including a few reasons why you felt it was a good connection and their full contact details.
- Stay connected** by reaching out periodically. I think once every five weeks for contacts in your top networking tier is a good frequency. For the next tier, perhaps once every three months or so.
- Continue to add value** to their lives. If you read an article that you think they would enjoy, copy it and mail or email it to them. Use voice mail to your advantage. Leave messages that will make them smile and will lift their spirits. Invite them to events they might be interested in. Be on the lookout for other good connections for them.



**About the Writer:** Kathy McAfee is The Marketing Motivator and President of Kmc Brand Innovation, LLC, an executive presentation coaching and consulting company. Her company helps corporate executives, business professionals and ambitious entrepreneurs become the recognized leaders in their fields by leveraging leadership, presenting, networking and personal branding to their advantage. To learn more, please visit [www.MarketingMotivator.net](http://www.MarketingMotivator.net)