

Extract from The Naked Networker

Chapter One



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Why Network?



People like to do business with those they have met face to face rather than just responding to a printed advertisement.

Networking is not about selling and, for many entrepreneurs, it takes a long time to realise that networking is not about sales or selling themselves or their business.

Networking is about building relationships and meeting the needs of others. The natural consequence of consistent and sincere networking is the fulfilment of your needs.

So how did I get into networking?

Many years ago I had a long and successful career as a business development manager. My role was remote to the company or “working from home” if you will. I had to generate qualified referrals to turn into sales to get my work and earn my income.

Being money oriented (or greedy!) made for great motivation to get out there and “network”. I was networking in the era when the world was run by oil companies and grey haired old men, when yuppies existed and the mobile phone was heavier than your briefcase. Not great for a “very” young woman. Every sale I completed netted me extra bonus on top of my salary. I wanted that money, it paid for my “extras” – holidays, motorbike (although it paid for the lessons and the licence first). Now this leads me to an interesting digression and a worrying fact. You can pay for a course, in England, that

allows you to go from never having ridden a motorbike to being legally licensed and able to buy any size bike you want.....in under a week? To say I have balls is an understatement. However, to have a taste for risk and adventure whilst being very aware of those around you is as true for motorbike riding as it is for networking.

Money is a great motivator, but if you own your own business, expense reduction and control and survival also help to motivate the novice networker.

The argument for business

Many businesses, both large and small, do not have a large advertising and marketing budget so what can you do? The smart businesses rely on word of mouth marketing and networking. The money saved by attending a regular breakfast at \$20 per month (\$240 annually) vs. media print ads at approx \$500 per month (\$6000 annually) is reason alone to read on and learn.

Think about people with whom you do business such as the doctor, bank, accountant and lawyer. The chances are you're already using someone who was recommended to you.

Networking has been shown to be:

- Nine times more effective in changing attitudes towards a product.
- More effective than third party reviews.
- More powerful than the consumer's own attitude towards a product.
- Customers acquired through word of mouth had a long-term value; nearly twice as high as customers acquired through other marketing channels.

Argument for the personal approach

People remember you for what you give them such as your time, attention, interest and a genuine desire to get to know them and their business better.

Most towns are now small, New Zealand is small and the world, with the Internet, is small. Your reputation and credibility travel with you through networking.

Networking is vital to the expansion of your profile and will lead you to those who can support and guide you on your journey. Remember that to maintain this, you must also introduce others to those who can support and guide them.

Even if you do not own your own business but are an employee networking can still increase your sales of your product or service – after all that's how I started.

I have met some incredible people who have become very good friends. Mentors, support – sometimes all three. But, if I hadn't spotted the opportunity to expand myself and “network”, these valuable people would not have been able to enter my life and change it for the better.

Whilst working for New Zealand's largest bank as a Commercial Manager I was introduced to a gentleman (yep I can call you a gentleman Michael) who came to present to the entire commercial manager team. He owned his own company, which showed business owners how to save money in their expenses and increase their bottom line. (Interestingly Michael had called his company The Bottom Line). For me, as a manager, this was great. I could save my customers money, strengthen their business, look incredibly good in the eyes of my customers and employer and sell my customers more with their released cash. I mean what was not to understand and like? However, it probably won't surprise you to know, that out of 120 bank managers only 1 (me of course) realised that. Amazing to me, apparently not so amazing to others who struggle to communicate with their bank.

By staying in touch with Michael, giving him referrals (add value before you can receive) I got to know an incredible intelligent man. We formed a friendship but more importantly for me, he became a mentor. Through this relationship we have now formed a great friendship and I truly believe this friendship saved my life and potentially my marriage a couple of years later. Michael has many sayings and an incredible network. Problem is most of his sayings are right you just have to be open enough to listen. “You can lead a horse to water.....but sometimes you feel like drowning it when it won't drink!” (Adapted from Michael www.tbler.com).

Networking can find you:

- Support peers
- Mentors – both personal and business
- Coaches
- Friends
- Fun