

Why should I network when everybody already knows me?

We've talked several times about the importance of a robust personal business network. Your personal business network is made up of professional relationships with relevant contacts. These contacts will help you achieve your vision of success.

Sadly, too many new entrepreneurs fail to consider building a personal business network when starting or running a small business.

When I discuss networking with my coaching clients, I'm often surprised by the response. Instead of asking me about how this is done, the most common first response is "Why?"

The typical client will tell me "I grew up here, I graduated from highschool here, everybody already knows me. Why should I network when everybody already knows me?"

So, to meet the needs of the listener, we'll address building a personal business network in two parts. Today, we'll cover part one; WHY?

Part one - Why

The answer to *why* lies in the *difference* between awareness and preference

We generally network to accomplish a goal. Accomplishing a goal often requires others to take action. *We generally don't take action because we're aware of something, we take action based on our preferences.*

We need to transition from awareness to preference because only preference equals action.

- We are aware of apples, but we prefer chocolate cake.
- We're aware of speed limits, but we prefer to go as fast as we want
- We're aware we should save for retirement, but we prefer a 65" flat screen TV

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How do you transition from awareness (everybody already knows me) to preference (people seek me out) in business networking?

There are three elements of using networking to create preference:

1. Are you **memorable**? Do you give others reason to remember you?
2. Are you **engaging**? Do you draw others to you?
3. Are you **meaningful**? Do you bring information or resources meaningful to your potential network?

When you bring all three, you create **preference** for you and your business.

Here's why all three are important

If you're not meaningful, I won't know why I remember you, even if you're memorable and engaging.

If you're not engaging, I won't know if you are meaningful because I probably won't talk to you long enough to find out.

If you're not memorable, I won't think of you after we met.

We'll discuss how to develop all three of these attributes next week, but today we'll stay focused on knowing your why.

Why do we network? To get something!

At the end of the day, we network to gain access to people, information and resources that we can't get by ourselves.

We remember that Secret five of the seven secrets of small business success was that wonky "access to capital and other vital business resources." In that discussion, we talked about how a robust personal business network can help a business person open doors to opportunities.

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What kinds of opportunities do most business people want?

1. **Many want more customers**, through referrals:

- Primary referrals; “Go see Kevin”
- Secondary referrals; “Yes, we have resources for that here. Bob, Sally and Kevin come to mind...”
- Tertiary referrals; “Yeah, Kevin’s a good guy.”

We generally spend effort on each referral level according to its impact on our particular business.

2. **Some want more business contacts** for internal needs.

- Financing, services like bookkeeping or tax preparation or to grow your team with more employees.

3. **Others are seeking more community contacts** to improve your access to information.

- Local elected officials, leaders in economic development, community revitalization or social programs.

4. **We all seek networking leverage**; A well-developed personal business network gives you resources to support the famous Rotary Rule for Referrals:

To get referrals, you gotta give referrals. Your business networking goals can, and should, be developed to serve as a resource for others, too. The real power of networking comes to fruition when others see *you* as a resource, too.

Now it’s time for your networking vision of success.

Begin with the end in mind - what does networking success look like? Which of these goals, or others of your own, do you wish to accomplish?

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Specific goals and outcomes give you something to work towards. These results become your vision of success to sustain your networking efforts.

My startup clients often ask, “But, I’m just starting out, what do I have to offer in networking?”

The one asset anyone can bring to a networking event is *the asset of being a good listener*. In our Secret Five discussion, I shared my experience with a chamber community marketing manager. This woman’s skill was collecting ‘haves’ and ‘needs’ from each member business, simply by listening.

Every time a ‘need’ was connected with a ‘have’, she was a hero. To me, this proves that *anyone can enhance their position in the business community, even if all you bring is being a good listener!*

One last point on WHY?

In my career in economic development, I worked for two executive directors who had two only professional skills:

- Each had superior networking skills
- Each was smart enough to hire people like me to do the actual work

This created what biologists call a symbiotic relationship. The networking director built the relationships, funding and visibility needed to support our team. With that great support, we practitioners were able to focus all of our efforts on the mission of the organization.

When effectively implemented, you really can succeed in business on networking skills alone!

We’ll discuss specifics next week, but until then I’d like to briefly address setting goals. You accomplish your vision by reaching your goals, and we’ve been told we should have S.M.A.R.T. goals. Hear that? That’s the sound of every listener

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rolling their eyes! They roll their eyes because the SMART model, while immensely popular, is totally useless. We've all sat through the workshops, and none of us were moved. There, I said it!

Back in 1981, when women's blouses were getting shoulder pads, George Doran, Arthur Miller and James Cunningham wrote their seminal article entitled "There's a S.M.A.R.T. way to write management goals and objectives."

In my opinion, every bit as useful as shoulder pads!

Why is the S.M.A.R.T. model useless? Because in the effort to come up with something memorable, the authors created something that is not meaningful or engaging (sound familiar?)

The concepts are there, but, again in my opinion, the concepts are in the wrong order, robbing this idea of its potential meaningfulness.

Rather than have S.M.A.R.T. goals, I ask my clients to have **R.A.S.T.O.M goals**

R.A.S:

- **R**elevant to your needs
- **A**chievable by you, with the resources you already have or can easily get
- **S**pecific, to keep your efforts focused and efficient

These three attributes give you the drive you need to move forward.

T.O.

- **T**ime **O**riented.

This attribute gives you a sense of urgency.

M.

- **M**easurable, so you will be able to track your progress towards your vision.

This attribute gives you satisfaction. You can see the results of your efforts.

Using RASTOM goals will help keep you moving forward.

Next time, Part two; We'll discuss *how* to build your personal business network, in detail, step by step.