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Smart Business Brief

Advice for Success!

Making Connections

Plan to include more time to network with fellow professionals and potential clients this year.

Business may be "busier" than ever, but don't allow yourself to be trapped indefinitely in your office. Get out from behind your desk and talk to managers, employees, fellow professionals, existing clients, and new clients. Resolve to expand your business and social circles in the upcoming year by including regular networking time in your schedule.



Join a group or two. Visit a few local networking and industry groups, mingle with the members, and choose a group that best suits you and best meets your needs. Some groups meet on a weekly or monthly basis while others may have fewer meetings in a year. Some are more lead-oriented and may place a limit on the amount of members that can represent one field. Groups such as this can offer the opportunity to be the only business provider in your industry, but you should also be prepared to spend time generating leads for others in your group. Some are regional and may include a variety of fields, but place no limits on the number of members. You may have some competition in the room, but there is likely to be a deeper pool of potential clients and there may be more scheduled time to network. Joining an industry group can also help build business. You may get invaluable advice from networking with others in your industry or combine forces with another professional to land a larger joint project, branch out in a new direction, or put pressure on common suppliers for better service or lower costs.

Attend a conference. Conferences can be a great way to make new business contacts across the country and across

the globe. Attend a conference to pick up some new skills or learn about current trends in your industry, but also plan to make a few new contacts with other attendees while you're there, and then continue that contact via e-mail, telephone, or over a cup of coffee.

Network in social settings. Networking can be fun. Don't limit yourself to networking groups and conferences. Network while you go to the gym, stand in line at the grocery, attend a holiday or cocktail party, or pursue a hobby or activity you enjoy. You never know where your next lead will come from, so expand your networking beyond people you know or plan to get to know and make an effort to get to know the person who happens to be in front of you.

Set aside a few minutes a day to strengthen and expand your network. A few minutes a day is all it takes to stay in touch with the people in your database. Executives who spend a few minutes a day calling or e-mailing colleagues, vendors, and other business associates have an advantage. Networking can provide business leads, and keep informed about current trends. It's also a great method to fill a vacancy in your company or help out your associates.