

Tips for Sustaining Meaningful Business Relationships

By Jacqueline J. Loewe

I've seen many professionals resist spending time building business relationships because they have never been taught how to do it. If this sounds like you, read on! You can strengthen the relationships you have, make new ones and wind up with a growing list of customers and contacts by undertaking only a few focused activities. The investment of time has long-term rewards and can make the difference between a year of growth and a year of stagnation.

Here are several easy ways in which you and your staff can build on your base of contacts.

Be a Third-Party Endorser

Become known as the person who has a list of experts for many purposes and proactively refer those experts to people who are in need of them. Not only do customers and vendors value you as a resource, the people you are referring may be in a position to return the favor and in turn, refer you to their contacts. Whenever you receive a referral, make it a priority to personally thank the person who referred you.

Invite a Valued Contact to Lunch

Take a contact to lunch and make it all about them, not you. Find out the kind of trends that impact the way they do business. Learn about the people who make the biggest impact on their bottom line. Who are they trying to connect with and how can you help them make those

connections? Most importantly, after the meeting, be sure to follow through with all the things you said you would do to help.

Bring a Contact to an Event as Your Guest

Everyone is looking for ways to meet more people with whom they can do business. If you belong to a professional association, bring a guest next time, especially if you know they would like to learn from the speaker. Anticipate the speaker's audience and if those attendees are part of your contact's target market, they will be thrilled to have you introduce them to all those new contacts.

Understand how Social Media Helps You Be a Better Connector

Embrace Social Media Tools rather than reject them as a waste of time or something only Generation X and Y uses. Times have changed. Most likely, some of your clients and contacts are using LinkedIn, Twitter or Facebook, so invest some time to learn the basics.

By spending a few hours a week, even just ten minutes a day using these tools, you will be able to efficiently reach groups of contacts and/or position yourself as a Thought Leader to the people you know and value. ■

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Jacqueline Loewe, founding Partner of Sheridan Park Consulting, provides business development consulting and relationship-building training. She has been connecting people in our industry for over 25 years, with clients like AIA Chicago, IL-ASLA and MELA. Find her at www.sheridanparkconsulting.com.



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