

TO NETWORK OR NOT TO WORK

By: Robert S. Sher

Two women were talking recently at a local deli. "How are you doing?" one asked. "At least I am still working," she replied. "You are? My contract is getting cut and I don't know what to do."

If these women want to continue working, they need to ramp up their networking efforts before their jobs end. Quite frankly, it all boils down to a simple math problem; the more people you know, the more opportunities you will get. Network or don't work - the choice is yours.

There are more options than ever for networking. Groups meet for every industry in every geographic area. Read local temple or synagogue newsletters, industry trade journals, business publications and meeting lists and you will find many good networking groups and opportunities. Local coffee shops often host these groups so check the bulletin boards for meeting times.

You can stay in the loop with or without a computer. Add technology and you get continuously increasing numbers of online social networking tools that can send you on your way to building lifelong relationships with colleagues, friends and mentors.

Networking has never been easier. Everyone needs assistance. Businesses need customers and opportunities and people need prospects and options. Networking is the most effective way to grow your business and your Rolodex. The most unlikely meetings can be the most productive.

You are not an island. If you get a call from someone who wants to meet, keep an open mind. Certainly this person wants something from you but what if the same person can connect you to something new? Think twice before you say no to a 30-minute meeting. If one of your contacts suggests you meet someone, do it, and keep that person in the loop and thank them for the introduction.

In the book, *Never Eat Alone*, networking guru and author Keith Ferrazzi says networking is "never simply about getting what you want. It's about getting what you want and making sure that the people who are important to you get what they want too." Ferrazzi suggests "pinging" - reaching those in your circle of contacts on a regular basis. His big secret, something I recommend all the time, is reaching out to other people. "What distinguishes highly successful people from everyone else is the way they use the power of relationships so that everyone wins," Ferrazzi writes.

The most critical element to good networking is to keep doing it. Never stop. No matter what tools you choose to network, remember these basic rules:

- Networking is a two-way street. If you want leads, provide leads to others.
- Don't be overbearing or too aggressive. You would not say "I love you" on a first date. Figure out a way to build the relationship and determine the best ways to work together and help each other.
- Don't forget to say thank you to anyone who introduces you to anyone else – whether opportunity follows or not. Keep your mutual contact in the loop.
- Don't brag about who you know. You will lose credibility if you suggest you can hook up someone with a big wig to impress others if you really cannot do it.
- Start every week with a list of prospects – those you know and those you want to know. Each Monday, start making calls or emails and make sure you schedule one new meeting by Friday.
- Follow up on every call, every email, and every lead. We are all busy but failure to follow up sends the message that you don't care. You don't want to miss out on any opportunity.

There is no time like the present to choose networking, the most positive option around, to help keep your head in the game.

Robert Sher, CPA, is a Certified Executive and Business Coach. Formerly CFO and partner for Schostak Brothers & Company, Sher has been a delegate from the Michigan Association of Certified Public Accountants to the National Future Forum working on the CPA "Vision" Project. Sher serves on the boards of numerous charitable and professional organizations. His Email address is: info@bobsher.com.