



## **6 Rules for Successful Networking** **By Lois Carter Fay**

If you were asked why you joined an organization or attended your chamber of commerce's "Business After Hours" meeting, would you reply that you wanted to network? Just what does this mean to you? Are you in an organization to gain support? Find resources? Secure clients? Learn new ways to handle your business challenges? Advance your career?

Most likely, it is a combination of all these reasons, with an emphasis on increasing your business. How can you encourage these contacts to give you business and referrals?

Consider these six basic principles of networking:

### **Principle #1: Use Your Sphere of 250**

Every person knows a minimum of 250 people, and many know significantly more than that. So, every person you meet and get to know increases your own network exponentially by a minimum of 250 people. That's why people can play the "Six Degrees Game," meaning that you can meet anyone you want—even heads of countries—by knowing just one person. Your contact knows someone else who can get you "one degree" closer to your prospect, and his contact knows someone else, etc., so that within a contact sphere of just six people you can get to anyone you want to meet. Try it; you'll be surprised.

### **Principle #2: Give First**

This is the one that women often do best. We have been taught to help others first and not expect anything in return. Although the basic rule still applies, and we should give referrals to others, the next rule addresses expectations. The old saying, "What goes around, comes around," is oh, so true.



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When you decide to go to your next meeting, think about why you are participating. Aren't you trying to increase your business? If you used the other members' businesses, or referred potential clients to them, would they be more comfortable referring business to you?

### **Principle #3: Keep Things Equal**

At Christmas when you receive a gift from someone, you expect to return a gift of equal value to your friend or loved one. Networking works on the same principle. If you give someone a referral, they are obligated to give you one. If someone gives you a referral, you are obliged to return the favor. We often brush off possible referrals because we are not used to receiving.

Don't let that happen to you. People enjoy giving; don't spoil their fun. Accept referrals graciously, and make sure that you work equally as hard to give valuable referrals to others.

### **Principle #4: Take Responsibility**

Don't forget to ask for what you want. Without asking for referrals, your contacts will not know you are interested in more business. It is your responsibility to communicate clearly, in a non-threatening manner, and generate your own referrals.

One very effective way to increase referrals is to meet with people you know on an informal basis to simply discuss each other's business and see how you can help one another. Find out who their potential customers are and tell them who yours are. You are sure to walk away with at least one referral each.

### **Principle #5: Manage Your Referrals Ethically**

Once someone refers you business, you are obligated to contact the referral to see if you can be of service, and to keep the person who referred the business to you informed of the situation. Always do your best and follow ethical business practices. And, *please*, remember to thank the referring source!

### **Principle #6: Be Specific**

This one is one of the most critical, yet hardest to follow. We tend to get lazy when we introduce ourselves, especially when we are in a stressful situation or a social setting.

Try to find a way to introduce yourself quickly and succinctly—*meaning in 30 seconds or less*—so that the person to whom you are speaking can get a clear picture of your customer, and your specific target market. It will help them focus their referrals. Don't say, for instance, "I'm a writer."



Consider an introduction like the one I use for my company, Strategic Business Partners. "Hi. My name is Lois Carter Fay. My company is Strategic Business Partners. I am a freelance writer and public relations specialist focusing on business, health and technology issues. Companies hire me to write articles, newsletters, reports and brochures, and to generate publicity for them on a national basis. In a just eight months, one of my clients received over 50 feature articles and mentions about their organization. It resulted in 8 new clients for them. Again, I'm Lois Carter Fay, Strategic Business Partners." You can also include a specific request like, "I would like to meet the CEO of XYZ Company. If you know Anita Jones, would you be willing to introduce me to her?"

Remember to say your name and company name at the beginning and at the end of your introduction. People often forget who you are once you've gone through your mini sales pitch. If you say something that piques their interest, you want them to remember who you are, so repeat your name and company at the end.

Now, here comes the most important series of questions to remember to ask..."Do you know anyone who could use my services (or product)? Would you be willing to give me their name and contact information? Or, better yet, would you give them a call and tell them about me?"

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Self-employed since 1990, Lois Carter Fay is the owner of [Strategic Business Partners](#), a marketing consulting firm that develops ideas and strategies to grow your business, [Words For Websites](#), a website writing and strategy business, and the [Marketing Idea Shop](#), an online resource for marketers and small businesses. She works with small business owners and managers to help them with all of their marketing and public relations issues. Find out more at <http://www.marketingideashop.com> .

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