



Is ‘networking’ a dirty word?

For many professionals “networking” can be a dirty word. For them, it represents working after work, pretending to participate in social functions while finding the perfect way to market. This approach can never succeed. I suggest that you view every networking event as a social event; a time to meet people to exchange ideas, to learn something and to discuss sports, art or politics. When you are yourself, you sell yourself.

Being great at what you do doesn’t ensure practice success. Through ethical, value-based networking, dentists can practice smarter and potentially increase profit. Networking helps dentists expand their knowledge base and get closer to their practice goals.

To me, networking is synonymous with connecting, teamwork and relationships. The strength of a group is stronger than the individual.

Who does one network with? One should network with everybody: patients, staff, colleagues, family, business people, media, community leaders, friends and anybody else you might interact

with. Networking is about giving and getting. Everybody has something to teach us, if we are receptive.

Integrity, honesty and high moral fiber are all necessary aspects of networking. Confidence is important, especially of others directed toward you. One needs to be a good listener, polite, diplomatic, have good communication skills and be a problem solver. It is important to be flexible, resourceful and clear.

Planning and organization are prerequisites to productive networking. Short, intermediate and long term goals need to be assessed. Know exactly what you want. Have a script mentally prepared. Your script should be concise, interesting and not too wordy. Constantly revise your goals and your script.

Always tell the truth and always follow through. Be

first class all the time. First impressions are important. The more you can offer another individual, the more likely that individual will want to recommend you. One must provide value in order to receive it. Listen carefully to what others tell you. Take a genuine interest in others. Do not prejudge people. Find common ground and ask insightful questions. Be a doer and be committed to helping others. The quality of all relationships is important. It is best to be kind and friendly and to display a positive attitude. Look into people’s eyes and remember what they’ve told you. People who respect you will send you business.

If you recommend somebody else’s expertise to another, everybody needs to be on board. Never refer without the other person’s permission.

One needs to be trustworthy, informative and competent. Being cited as an expert, doing the job right the first time and having proper credentials are all essential. It is OK to toot your own horn if it’s done in a non-threatening, ego-free fashion. Have your discussions count. Don’t give up easily. Make small talk more effective for you. Each professional should individualize the style of networking utilized. Look for role models to emulate. Body language and appearance are always important. We are being judged all the time.

In order to be a successful networker, one must avoid bragging, interrupting, whining and the hard sell. Infringing on one’s personal space, flirting and using racial and sexual slurs are all unacceptable behaviors.

The common fears of rejection, limited self-image and procrastination all need to be overcome. We all offer value. Asking for referrals should be done on a regular basis. It is best accomplished by being yourself. Keep your networking headlights on. All situations are potential opportunities.

Networking for me is about giving unconditionally. The benefits that I receive in return have been far better than any of my expectations. ■

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