



Networking

For Assignments

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Interim Assignment

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Section 1

INTRODUCTION

Like it or not (and many don't!!), the ability to network effectively is probably the biggest single factor in winning interim and consulting assignments, yet most do not take the time to improve their skills and confidence in this crucial area.

This e-book is designed to give you the processes, skills and confidence to be a successful networker.

By following these guidelines you will WIN MORE BUSINESS. Just as important, the fact that you will be offered MORE ASSIGNMENTS will mean you have more to choose from and will therefore be winning assignments which you really want and will enjoy. You will not have to take the first one that comes along.

Section 2

WHY NETWORKING FAILS?

There are two fundamental reasons why networking doesn't work for a lot of people:

1. Networking in the wrong places with the wrong people

There are hundreds of networking events open to you and often, if you're just starting out or facing a business slump, your tendency maybe to 'be busy' and attend as many as possible. The problem is that so many of these events are populated by independent interims, consultants and contractors who are also looking for work! Whilst that may be useful to test and refine your value proposition and you may make some useful contacts it will often be a waste of your time as far as actually identifying real potential business opportunities is concerned. It is important right from the start to value and put a price on your time

2. Not networking effectively with the right people

Unless you approach great networking events in a systematic way you may waste the opportunities that they offer. You may miss out on meeting the people who can really help you, you may not create a great impression on those you do meet, and you may end up spending (wasting!) a lot of time with people who are not great contacts – the list goes on.

This e-book shows you exactly how to overcome the above two barriers to effective networking by:

- Ensuring you select the right events to attend
- Working them effectively

Section 3

WHERE SHOULD I NETWORK?

This is an impossible question to answer as it depends completely on 1) what services you offer and 2) to which market(s).

Unless you are clear about the answers to these two questions, then much of your networking could be a waste of time and you will end up attending events populated largely by people like you who are also looking for assignments! An unfocused approach rarely works.

*Network at the places
where your potential
customers and market
influencers network*

The trick is to network at those events:

- where your potential customers network – e.g. if you are a supply chain specialist, you'll go to events or join online networking groups where supply chain specialists go
- where people who could get you in front of your potential customers network – e.g. other successful interims/consultants/companies who serve the same target markets though usually in complementary rather than competing areas
- where people who influence your potential customers network e.g. journalists or industry watchers who specialise in your target market



Your first tasks are therefore to

1. Identify your target markets and the people you want to meet within them that face the issue you can help resolve. Sales Directors in medium sized high tech organisations, Supply Chain Directors in the Food industry.
2. Identify all the organisations and people who influence your marketplace or could offer introductions into your marketplace

e.g. The Institute of Sales and Marketing Management, the CIPD, the International Association of Outsourcing Professionals, venture capital companies, business school alumni, service providers, conference organisers etc

3. Identify where they 'meet' either physically or online and make sure you are there!

Section 5

HOW DO I MAKE THE MOST OF NETWORKING EVENTS?

So far, so good. You've identified the people you really want to meet, you know where they meet and you've made sure you are there too so you have the opportunity to meet them. The challenge now (and for many the most daunting!) is to attend the event and make sure you actually do meet them and create the right impression.

The Golden rule of networking - don't try and sell!!

The first thing you need to remember is that **you do not attend a networking event in order to sell your services, to get an 'order'**. You attend purely and simply to meet

key people, establish a relationship and arrange to meet them at a later date.

Bearing that in mind, we'll split this section up into three parts:

- Preparing for the event
- At the event
- After the event

Preparing for the event

This is a critical part. As the saying goes "If you fail to prepare, you prepare to fail".

Goals

The first step is to establish your goals for the event, what you want to achieve from it. Your ultimate reason for attending is to win assignments but we've agreed you're not going to even try and achieve that on the night.

So what are you aiming to achieve. Really it's about establishing a rapport, a relationship. It's about establishing whether there is a potential mutual benefit in taking the relationship further and, if so, arranging to meet up at a later time to have more in-depth discussions (or at least arranging to call to arrange to meet at a later time). You do not usually want to get tied up in lengthy meetings at a networking event. After all, you (and probably they) have presumably turned up to meet several people

"If you fail to prepare - then prepare to fail"

and therefore do not want to spend all your time just talking to each other.

Often you can find out who will be attending the actual event, or who usually attends, beforehand and you can identify those you would like to meet. It can be a good idea to identify the A's, B's and C's at an event. The A's being your top priority and the C's your lower priority. You could therefore set a goal to meet all the A's (who actually attend), establish a relationship and arrange to meet as many as possible in a follow up meeting.

Naturally there will be other people at the event who you have not heard of, or maybe you were unable to get a list of delegates before the event and so have been unable to identify your 'targets'. Your goal may therefore be somewhat less focused and be to meet at least ten people, qualify their status (A,B,C) and then arrange to have follow up meetings with the A's. A word of warning for those just starting out in business on their own. Sometimes in the need to be busy, we'll meet anyone who will meet us! If you were busy you would probably only want to meet the A's on your list (those where there is a strong chance of a mutually beneficial relationship). Be careful with your precious time! Again remember to value your time.

Finally, what do you need to take? You'll need your business cards and you'll need a small notebook and pen or dictaphone and nothing else. You need no other information about yourself or your company

You don't need to take brochures, CV's or Powerpoint presentations!!

or services. You'll have time in the follow up meetings to give these out if you need to. Remember you are there to get meetings with key people, not to sell to them. If they won't meet you on the basis of a conversation, it's unlikely they will be swayed by a brochure or CV. Some people I know have their own name badges printed (in case the organisers do not supply them) and this does seem to work very well. Personally I have found it to be easier to strike up a conversation when people are wearing badges. Maybe people see you as the host!

At the Event

Assuming you've done your preparation, you'll be armed with business cards, a notebook and pen and a couple of targeted goals. Now we attend the event and our job is to make the most of the event by achieving our goals. If you follow the guidelines in this section you will stand a very good chance of achieving just that and if you do, you'll be well on your way to identifying and winning more assignments.

Making the first move

Often the most difficult bit for some! Here are some tips:

Arrive early – some people find this easier than walking into a room already full of people and then trying to 'break into' someone else's conversation. It can also give you time to talk to the host, explain why you are there, who you would like to meet and ask for their help in introducing you

Arrive early and enlist the help of the host

If you do arrive later and there is already a room full of people, **identify the 'softer' targets**, those who look as though they would welcome an approach. People on their own are obviously usually a pretty good bet, groups take a little more thought but with a bit of common sense you can easily tell those that will welcome your approach and those that will find it to be an 'interruption'. Simply look carefully at them – are they facing each other and deep in conversation, seemingly oblivious to their surroundings? Then don't approach them! Are they standing more to the side of each other, looking around the room occasionally and talking more casually? Then the chances are they are open to an approach. Simple but effective.

Opening The Conversation

Well, let's keep it simple. I suggest when you are approaching an individual you start with "Hello, I'm, may I join you? And if you are approaching a group you start simply with "May I join you?" In this way you are not assuming acceptance. When they say yes as they pretty much undoubtedly will, you can introduce yourself.

Naturally they will then reciprocate by introducing themselves.

Developing The Conversation

Next, ideally you want to find out about them first. Why? There are two main reasons:

1. People usually like to talk about themselves and they like people who are interested in them. The best way of building rapport is therefore to ask them about themselves. Questions beginning with what, when, where, how, who are open questions and get people to open up. For example; What do you do? How did you get into that? How is business? Who do you work with? Who are your clients? How is your industry changing? What challenges does that bring? What are you doing to overcome these? Again a warning, it should not come across as an interrogation, but should be based on genuine interest in the person and their answers. Aim then to make your next question a natural progression of their previous answer. If, for example they say "this is creating a challenge for us in

Ideally you should find out about them first so you can tailor your response when it's your 'go'!

finding enough of the right people to meet this business boom” you will naturally then want to ask how they are addressing this, what initiatives they have in place, what their competition are doing about the issue and so on.

2. They are at some stage (unless they are very rude!!) going to ask what you do. If you know about them first, you can tailor your response to their situation. In the above example you may therefore (if it’s true!!) say “I am an interim HR manager specialising in helping organisations attract and retain great people!” What a coincidence!!

Obviously, you’re not always going to be quite so lucky in your meetings and those you meet will not usually be potential customers so you must prepare your ‘standard’ response to the question “What do you do?” When asked this question, most people will answer with:

- Their job title – e.g. Finance Director, Interim Manager, CEO

Or

- What they do – I run workshops on....., I relocate factories, I’m responsible for

As an interim manager/consultant, this is not an effective or compelling response. You are hired to get results so your response must focus on the results you get e.g. in the case of Interim Assignment, I would say “I help people escape the corporate treadmill”. Now, what else can they say but “What does that mean?” I now have an opportunity to explain in more depth and I’ll do so using a relevant value proposition. The format for this would be roughly as follows:

1. The sort of people I work for and the issues they face
2. What I do for them
3. The benefits they get
4. Examples of your successes

So again in the case of Interim Assignment I would say something along the lines of:

“Well, a lot of senior executives nowadays are becoming disenchanted with corporate life. They give many reasons for this but the most common are: the hours they work are ridiculously long and they get little time with their families, they seem to have lost control over their own working lives, they dislike the negative politics, they no longer get to focus on the real value-adding work they used to enjoy – the list goes on.

Develop your 60- second response based on your Value Proposition

Based on the fact I have been an interim manager/consultant for the last thirteen

years and during the last three years have worked with over 500 such people, I have developed an approach which will do two things 1) help them decide if a career as an interim manager/consultant is viable for them and 2) help them kick-start their careers if they decide it is.

Typically clients will find the assignments they want, more quickly and at a higher daily/project rate.

For example one client told me she reckoned it had speeded up finding her first assignment by two months and at £700.00 a day that equated to an additional £28,000 in earnings."

This response will take less than one minute but pretty well sums up what I want them to know about me.

Your task then is to prepare your standard response (Value Proposition) to the "What do you do?" question. I will give an in depth insight into Value Propositions and a step by step process for developing them in a forthcoming E-Book. (email info@interimassignment.com to be notified when the book is available.)

Closing the conversation

We've said earlier that you've attended a networking event and speaking with one person for the whole event isn't really networking! This means that you or the person/people you are speaking with will at some stage want to terminate the conversation and a frequent concern is how to best to do this without causing offence?

Now, if we go back to our goals, we wanted to set up meeting with 'A-Listers'. So we need to exchange cards and set up a date either for a meeting or a time to call to set up the meeting. For others we will probably just exchange cards but don't make a commitment if you are not intending to follow it through.

So, to making your escape. You could say "Well, we're here to network so we'd better go and do it! It's been great to meet you and I hope you enjoy the rest of the event." This will work fine but you are missing a potential opportunity. What if you could help the person you just met and they could help you meet more of the right people? What if you were to ask them who they would ideally like to meet at the event and then offer to introduce them, should you come across such a person. They would then surely reciprocate wouldn't they? You would then both have an additional 'salesperson' at the networking event looking for opportunities with each other.

Finishing the conversation could then look something like this. "Tell me; what sort of people would you ideally like to meet at networking events like this? If I meet any as I go round would you like me to

Offer to network on each others behalf

introduce you or point them in your direction?" When they offer to reciprocate be ready to explain what an A-lister to you would look like, then say "It's been great meeting you and I'll certainly look out for on your behalf as I meet others"

After the event

Afterwards, like any important event in your business, you need to evaluate its success and your own performance:

- Did you achieve your goals?
- What helped and hindered you in achieving them?
- What did you personally do well and not so well?
- What would you do differently in future? (this may be to strike the event off your list!)

Lastly, but certainly not least, assuming all went well, you will have phone calls to make, meetings to arrange and prepare for and databases to maintain. Do them straight away or at the time you said you would. In other words if you said you would call to arrange a meeting at 10.00am on Monday morning, then do it. If you said you would send them an article or a website address first thing tomorrow, then do it. If you leave actions they probably won't get done and probably the single biggest cause of the failure of networking initiatives is a lack of follow through. You should see networking as an ongoing process and not as an isolated event.

*Networking will fail if you
don't FOLLOW UP!!
Think of it as an ongoing
process and not an
isolated event*

It's also important that you stay in contact, that you keep your network alive even if your own immediate 'need' may have been satisfied (i.e. you already have sufficient work) and therefore have no immediate need to network. If you only get in touch with people when you need their help, they will begin to steer clear of you. Find ways to keep in touch – let them know what you are up to, send them information that may help them or that they may find interesting. Invite them to network events you are attending. Offer to help them. Ask them how they are doing and what challenges they are facing and offer to help if you can.

Section 5

SUMMARY

So that's networking in a nutshell. Getting it right can have a massively beneficial impact on your success. It can ensure a constant stream of opportunities, which are the lifeblood of your business. Many fear it and avoid it but unnecessarily. The situations we fear hardly ever occur but then that could be said about most

fears in life. These guidelines, if followed, will ensure the worst never happens and the best usually does. In summary:

- Attend the right events – go where the people go who can positively impact on your success
- Set goals for the event of who you want to meet and what you want to achieve but don't try and sell
- Keep it simple – just take business cards, a notebook and pen and a name badge
- Enlist the help of the host to introduce you to the people you want to meet
- Ask about them first and be interested in the answers
- Prepare your response to the question "What do you do?" with a 60 second value proposition and be prepared to adapt it to the person you are speaking with
- Offer to help introduce others, they are bound to reciprocate
- Follow up – networking is an ongoing process not an isolated event

Enjoy your networking and let me know your success stories by emailing me at info@interimassignment.com.

