

i-define – business networking

by Dawn Winder

Business networking is something that has become a hot topic over the last few years. It is not just essential for business owners, we all need to understand networking and appreciate that it is a life skill, not unlike reading and writing - it is not an 'opt-in' activity. It is essential.

Networking is something we all know is important. However many people find it difficult to make the most out of the opportunities it brings. They find it ineffective and not enjoyable. Networking is on our to-do list, but when it comes to it, we don't put ourselves out there or get out of our comfort zone. But networking is a skill that can be learned and developed.

Over the years I have found most successful people are not smarter or harder working; they have better communication skills. They know how to communicate effectively in all situations and are especially good networkers.

One of the greatest obstacles to effective networking is getting across your message in a clear concise manner.

With the i-define unique process there are four things to remember:

- Discover - who you are and what makes you unique
- Communicate – your value, creating interest and desire
- Define – your marketplace; the best places, groups and people with whom to network
- Create – a consistent identity to ensure you are credible to your network

In today's highly competitive business climate time is limited and self-promotion and Personal Branding have become essential tools in networking.

It is very easy to overlook the principle of preparation for networking, but there are three basic stages; before, during and after the event. Here are my top seven tips for preparing for each of these three stages.

Before

- Know current affairs within your industry
- Have a clear idea of who you know and to whom you can refer people
- Research potential groups and opportunities and styles of networking
- Know a compelling answer to the question "so what do you do?"
- Arrive 15 minutes early to avoid walking into a room full of people

During

- Find people on their own, and approach them with open body language
- Be curious, focus on them – take an active interest in the conversation
- Don't offer a card; ask for one. The card you need is theirs – asking shows interest
- Don't just grab the card and put it away, look at it, make a comment
- Be ready to move on politely by summarising and thanking

After

- Write down important information about the person straight after you meet them
- Follow up soon after – don't leave it too late
- A hand written note is very powerful
- Have a system for maintaining contacts
- Keep networking even if you think you have all the work you can cope with