

SMALL BUSINESS MATTERS

Business Relationships: Network! Network! Network!

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Do you find yourself only taking the time to develop relationships with associates or contacts key to your job, your profession or your business? Or conversely, do you take the time to look beyond your everyday contacts and seek out meeting new people? This may depend on both your personality and your opportunity to meet new business contacts. No matter how comfortable you are at building or extending your personal business network, there is tremendous benefit in taking inventory of any and all potential opportunities for both you and your business on a regular basis.

So where to start? If you are a natural people person then all you need is to be parachuted into in a room full of new people and be set loose to mix and mingle. However, if this is not a natural fit with your personality, then do not worry. You can rely on those you know well to lead the way and over time you may become more comfortable as you get exposed to more new situations. Those you know may help you arrange opportunities to meet new people through their contacts and personal network.

Whether you handle with ease meeting new people or rely on others to assist you, here are some things to consider in building or extending your business network:

- Join a business network, chambers of commerce, industry associations, and seek community involvement opportunities whether short term such as an event or longer term such as a committee or board.
- Keep an eye for business events or functions in your area like those held during small business week, various meet and greets, training workshops, industry meetings, business tradeshow, or any other gathering of organizations, businesses, and/or government departments.
- Take time to really talk with your customers or clients, get to really know your suppliers, value your employees, respect coworkers and supervisors, and so on. These folks are not just your present but may represent your future. A customer could become an angel investor, a supplier could become a business partner, and a coworker could be your future boss.
- Be very diplomatic when it comes to your political contacts. Of course you can have political affiliations as you participate in democracy but ensure you know how these things are appropriate for you and to what extent in your current circumstances both professionally and personally.
- Everyday activities such as family outings, trips to the store, or time spent in doctor waiting rooms can be when you meet new people or get to know better those you already know. You never know who you will run into or sit beside.
- Expanding you network beyond your local area can be accomplished through both your business and personal travel. Think global!
- In all your interactions you will have greater success if you approach others and every situation with respect for differences of opinion and realize that respect will always outlast a difference of opinion on a given topic, on a given day. So don't just build relationships, also maintain!

This business article does not suggest that the above is easy or one size fits all. It merely illustrates some approaches to building and maintaining your personal business network. It can't be overstated. Your network is the only thing that will last beyond your current job or business so take care of it.

For more information on business financing and other services of CBDC South Coast call 1-800-303-2232 or 538-3846.