

How To Properly Network For PT's & OT's– It's Not About Mingling Or Working A Room!

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Many professionals network wrong. They race around the room handing out business cards and selling their products and services. That is unfortunate considering networking environments can be very beneficial to building your business. When you consider that in this day and age most of us are attending many events with others that can assist us to achieve our professional goals, it is important to be a skillful “networker”.

This article will help you to build professional relationships in networking situations that lead to profitable interactions and valuable resources. You will learn to overcome your feeling of rejection and ease your worries so you can build those important professional relationships.

Many of us feel uncomfortable meeting others, especially physicians. We feel a strong desire to avoid interaction due to false fears such as the fear of rejection, the fear of looking bad, and the fear of making a fool of ourselves. Those are natural fears that you can overcome with the strategies in this column. Let's look at the specific steps to successful networking.

1. Outline your networking objectives prior to attending your event. Consider who would be the most valuable for you to make initial contact with and with whom you should invest your time. If you know the physician you would like to meet is present, make contact with them as soon as the first opportunity presents itself. Physicians will typically not stay at these events too long; our best bet is to reach them before anyone else does...or before they leave!

2. Make casual conversation to introduce yourself to other potential valuable contacts and inquire about others who may be a good match for you. You may also take this time to identify the contacts you have previously classified as your targets. For instance, if you have never met the director orthopedics, you can ask someone to point them out to you. While making conversation, keep your ears open and listen for opportunities which you can act on at this event or future functions.

Once I was directed to a new physician that was in desperate need of my services. I immediately began working with this surgeon three and a half years ago and he is now one of my primary sources for referrals. I probably never would have met them any other way. You must consider networking to be a “marketing activity”. In order for it to work you have to constantly do it!

3. When your target is alone, take that opportunity to approach them. Introduce yourself. Be sure to be completely focused on them and provide them with your full attention. Nothing is worse than making a bad first impression. Engage them with questions and explore how you can bring value to the relationship.

For instance, if they explain they are having certain problems with a specific patient population, offer to share a book, website or article with them you found effective in that problem. If they are looking for a new therapist, suggest someone you know that does good work. The key is to find out what you can do for them to continue the relationship. Do **NOT** take this time to sell them YOUR product or service. Commit to following up with them immediately in the next business day.

4. Immediately provide them with the information or resource that will help them. You may do this via phone, mail, or e-mail. Keep in mind that you are creating an image with your actions. Do not create the wrong kind of image and fail to deliver exactly as you promised within the specific time frame. It is much easier to create an initial positive image then correct a negative image later.

5. Seven to ten days later follow up with them to confirm receipt of the resource. Suggest other ways you may be able to assist them, directly and indirectly. This may be through offering other resources or your own products or services. A nice way to handle this is by saying, "Would it be beneficial for me to send you an information packet on my services as well?"

6. Seven to ten days follow up and ask if may be beneficial to get together and see if your product or service would be a good match for their needs. If they are open to meeting you, take the meeting and begin to establish a working relationship. If they are not interested in meeting you, ask if you may stay in touch and if they know of anyone who may be in need of the services you provide.

7. Stay in light contact with them via phone, e-mail, and networking events. As you grow your relationship with them you will be creating future potential business for yourself and a valuable contact that you can access and refer to others.

These are the seven steps to successful networking. It should never be about distributing large quantities of your business cards. It should be about acquiring potential clients contact information and building value. Focus on the quality of your networking not the quantity. You will be using your time wisely and focusing your efforts in the most advantageous manner. By following these steps, you will continually be building your business and creating profitability for yourself and your organization.