



**Making Connections:
How to Network Effectively to Build
Better Business Relationships
(Revised & Updated 2021)
By Gail Gibson**

Making Connections
How to Network Effectively to Build Better Business Relationships

©Gail Gibson

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Rave Reviews

"Gail highlights the simplicity and the subtlety of effective networking. Implement Gail's tips and you will never miss an opportunity again!"

Tamsin Garrie, Network Director, 4Networking

"Gail has encapsulated the essence of networking in this book and provided useful advice that even the most seasoned networker will find helpful."

Sue Stockdale, Executive Coach, Polar Explorer and UK Chapter Chair, Women Presidents Organisation – a global network

Amazon Reviews

"This easy-to-carry book contains all you need to know about networking. You probably know what business networking is all about already, so this is very useful refresher to remind you what to do. It contains lots of essential do's and don'ts."

Dave Richardson

"It's short, snappy and has some great tips both for those who already use networking to market their business, and for those who are considering starting."

Sarah

"Gail has encapsulated the key aspects of networking in today's business world in an easy-to-read (and easy-to-carry) format. Whether you're thinking about adding Networking to your marketing strategy or already use it but need guidance, a quick run through this book will highlight how to make the most of it. No preference is made to any networking organisation, so the content will appeal to a wide audience. Set into 10 distinct sections, cleverly using the NETWORKING acronym, you can read this in one go or a section at a time. This also makes it easy to refer to specific areas."

Chris

"Really easy to read and with a summary at the end of each chapter, this has just motivated me to make more of networking opportunities and to have a game plan ready for when I attend meetings. Concise enough to read in one sitting."

Han

Chapter One

N is for Networking.

Networking is an everyday interaction. If you think about it, most people interact with family, friends, colleagues, and clients regularly, sometimes daily, within any group or community they are a part of.

When you network you give yourself an opportunity to connect with individuals and groups of people, associate with likeminded people, extend your thought processes, and develop, nurture, and grow relationships.

The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus (1997) defines the word "Network" as *a group of interconnected people or things*. Therefore networking is a framework or a platform for people to be linked together to communicate, think, share ideas and knowledge, learn, be inspired and grow.

Consider the groups, communities and associations that you are involved with. Whichever type you attend, whether you do so online or offline, you will network or chat, talk, converse with the people there. Interactions begin as soon as you arrive. You meet or are introduced to someone and you start talking to them.

As your conversation continues you begin to learn more and more about the person you are talking to. You can ask questions, share thoughts and ideas, and you may even learn something new as a result.

When you continue to attend networking events your networking skills develop, and you start to build deeper relationships with others.

What is it that encourages you to network within a certain group, community or association? Do the words likeminded, familiarity, security and support spring to mind? Networking brings together these elements to help you effectively communicate and work with others and build a team of supportive, trusted, and expert advisors.

A Recipe for Success

Using the analogy of baking a cake, let us look at how networking can mix together the right ingredients for both personal and business success.

How do you bake a great cake? You start by following a proven recipe. What does a recipe provide you with? A list of ingredients in various quantities and set timings to

follow, and a series of instructions or a method about how and when to add certain ingredients, including a process of what to mix first.

Networking is a process, although not to be strictly followed like a recipe, however being prepared is a key. When you prepare to bake a cake, you set out all the ingredients and utensils you need, and you turn on the oven. The same approach applies when you prepare yourself for a networking event.

To help you have a positive, engaging, and memorable networking experience, your preparation ingredients should include:

- Business cards or promotional flyers with your contact details (for offline events)
- Request in advance an attendees list (if possible) to help you identify specific people you would like to meet and connect with.
- An open and curious approach to discover, explore, and grow, both yourself and your network.
- Have a goal in mind. Consider what you want to achieve from each event you attend. Are you a first-timer who has never networked before and you are at the start of your networking journey? Are you new to the area and you are keen to establish and build a local network? Do you want to meet a specific contact as a potential client or to collaborate on a project? Do you want to challenge your thinking, gain knowledge, or be inspired and motivated to develop yourself personally?
- Practice but avoid over-rehearsing your USP (Unique Selling Point)
Remember, your pitch is a work in progress. With consistency comes an opportunity to keep improving and tweaking your words. Strive to create a pitch that intrigues and engages your audience and delivers the unique voice of your brand.

As listed above, there are many reasons why people network. Being prepared is important however over preparation and a closed approach may limit your chances of success. Imagine missing an opportunity of a lifetime to be connected to someone who can completely transform your thinking and/or your business or become your biggest client. I always say to my clients, you never know who you will meet, and you never know where a conversation may go.

As you prepare, challenge yourself to focus your intention on being open, curious, and helpful in each conversation. Adopt a learning attitude.

When you attend networking events with an open approach, you can be ready for opportunities that can help you achieve or exceed your goal, as you connect, listen, and ask questions. An open mind can help you become more aware of opportunities to grow your business as you meet people who can shift and elevate your business in a different, and progressive direction. Get into the habit of asking open questions of the people you meet. Practice and master your listening skills, to ensure you listen

deeply to their responses, to hear for cues to offer a solution, share advice, or connect someone.

When you *really listen*, you gift yourself and your fellow networkers the potential to open new doors of opportunity.

The Right Mix

The difference between a delicious cake and a tasteless one is in the mixing and blending stages. Forget the flour and eggs (generally) and you have no cake. What you end up with is a pile of sludge in your cake tin.

When you mix and blend with the right people, in other words when you network with likeminded individuals, these interactions will become an invaluable asset to building and sustaining your business relationships.

Add the right proportions to your mixture, to create a series of positive steps to your individual set of ingredients. Remember though, it is all about maintaining the perfect blend - not too much or too little of any one thing.

A Slice of Excellence

Now your cake is ready to bake. At the ideal temperature, as your cake rises, you will meet new challenges through networking, helping you grow as an individual and within your business. Opportunities will present themselves as you blend your expertise, conversation, listening skills, and support with others.

Build on each interaction to develop strong and mutually beneficial, value-added business relationships.

After an event, make time to follow up with the people you spoke to (and continue to develop this action to embed it as a consistent, on-going habit). Follow up in a timely manner, on the same day, or within 1-2 days of the event. Arrange how you will follow up with your connections, via email, social media messaging, a phone call, or online chat.

If you promised to send information about a business opportunity, send it. If you agreed to introduce and connect someone to a contact in your network, do it. Whatever you said you would do, make the task a priority and deliver as promised.

People will take notice of how you show up and follow up. As you build your networking skills, consider your choice of approach – will I be remembered and valued, or will I be forgotten and ignored?

Only make direct contact with the people you had conversations with. Avoid sending spam emails to everyone on the attendees list. Focus on becoming a trusted, super connector, with integrity.

Your cake is ready. It is time to serve up your beautiful creation. As you network the business message you deliver should be designed to meet with and exceed peoples' expectations.

Create a reputation that positions you as the icing on the cake.

Throughout your networking journey, as you bring together the right blend of ingredients, you will deliver a unique recipe of success for you and your business. Networking can be a powerful tool to help you present your slice of business excellence.

Action summary:

Before the meeting:

- Make sure you have plenty of business cards/flyers (offline)
- Request an attendees list if one is available.

During the meeting:

- Be aware of opportunities that may grow your business, including those that may take it down a different route.
- Ask open questions of the people you meet.
- Listen with intent during conversation to make sure you catch any opportunities.

After the meeting:

- Follow up on any conversations you had.
- Send any information you have promised.
- Only contact people you spoke to at the event.

Chapter Two

E is for Experience.

Networking is about sharing and gaining experience.

One of the best things I have discovered about networking is that it attracts individuals in business from all walks of life. No matter where or with whom you network there will always be one constant: life experience. Without it you would not be where you are today; whether you are just starting out in business or have been established in business for some years. Life experience is a personal journey about where you've come from, where you are right now, and what you plan to do to reach your goals.

What does life teach us?

Throughout our lives we gain life experience from ourselves, the work we do, the places we travel to, the books we read, the podcasts we listen to, the movies we watch, and the people we meet, connect with, talk to, and associate with. This vast array of gathered life experience consists first and foremost with those closest to us, our family, friends, colleagues, and clients.

Experience is what life has taught us; how we arrive at our thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and actions.

Our thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and actions may be the result of what we've learned, been influenced by, or chosen to act upon. When we interact with others at networking events, we increase this experience, through knowledge gained or skills developed. Each person you talk with will have their own life experiences.

From a networking perspective, you will meet people who share both positive and negative experiences in business. Either way, you will quickly discover, the outcome of the experience will be a lesson learned.

What can you gain from the experiences of others?

As mentioned in Chapter One, conversation is a key to any successful networking experience. If you are new in business talking about an experience in life or business is an instant conversation starter; a primary steppingstone on which you can begin to build a relationship. In my experience, it has been the power of these initial conversations that encourages you to share, discuss and even discover solutions based on each other's experiences.

Before you start talking business with someone, natural conversation flows easier when you find common ground.

Think about a first meeting with someone. Do you find yourself thinking - What should I say? The reality is, you have the skills to chat, so start a conversation without over thinking too much about what you will say.

A little small talk is acceptable. Make a comment on the location you are in, ask about the journey to the venue, or mention something topical you heard or read about. Let your conversation find its own path. I have no doubt, one of you will ask a question and your conversation will flow.

Networking is a Two-Way Street.

Listening is the next skill to master as you become a successful networker. When you are new to networking, or a seasoned networker, there is nothing worse than being stuck in a conversation where one person is completely dominant. Within their solo performance, you hear about their life and business experiences, including a list of accomplishments (what they have done/tried/tested), and that few or none of them have worked.

At one of the first networking events I attended, I found myself cornered by a solo performer. This person proceeded to tell me about their pre-business career. Next, they told me they had chosen to become a coach to tell people what to do. Not knowing how to escape the onslaught of this one-sided lecture, which lasted for about 15 minutes, I was fortunately rescued by the event host. What did I learn from the experience? As my confidence grew, through consistent practice, my get out move is to politely interrupt, say Thank you for the chat, and to head to the coffee station for a refill.

The important message from this story is to focus on your networking conversation being a two-way street. This will provide an equal chance to chat, with each person given airtime to speak, and listening time to listen.

When you listen with genuine intent and purpose you often discover gems of information that can help you in business. These pearls of wisdom may be helpful advice, handy hints, and tips, or provide inspiration for a new idea in your business.

When you make a commitment to a networking group, community, or association, this can work in your favour. Commitment establishes a strong foundation to any relationship upon which growth can be built. Your commitment to networking should be consistent and regular.

In my experience, “casual networkers” can be viewed as individuals who consider networking to produce instant and one off results, rather than investing their time to make full use of a two way street. Look both ways, listen, look again, and then proceed.

As a networking newbie, it is good practice to visit a few different networking groups in your area. When you do this, you give yourself a chance to see which group is an ideal fit with your game plan. To achieve the best outcome for you and your business, you need to surround yourself with people who inspire, challenge, support, and reciprocate, who have the potential to become your client or customer and buy your product or service. Test the water before you plunge in.

Build Better Relationships

Successful networking is about fostering positive relationships.

Through sharing your life experience, you will find that your business relationships and interactions with people will evolve. The more often you interact, the more you will learn. Building any good relationship takes time, patience, and nurturing. The best relationships are based on the process of give and take. This is what makes networking such an effective tool to grow your business. It’s your opportunity to choose to work with someone you like, get to know and trust.

When you take the time to share the challenges and celebrations of your business experiences with others you will enhance both your credibility and your reputation.

Along your journey you will make mistakes, you will enjoy successes, but most of all; you will learn about who you are and how to make your business work for you. Sharing this information openly is a reflection of who you are as an individual and as a business person, adding a human touch as you foster your relationships. It shows others how you have learned from past experiences and it paints a clearer picture of the way you manage and deliver yourself and your business.

Enjoy the Experience.

In this chapter we have talked about learning from and about experience. However, networking is also about the “experience”. Reflect back on a time when you have attended something in your life that has been a great “experience”. How did you feel? What was it that created that feeling for you?

Networking is designed to give you an “experience”; from mixing with likeminded individuals for confidence building, motivation,

inspiration, and support, to discovering problem solving solutions for your business.

Have fun as you network. Networking is not only about 'serious business stuff'. Allow your personality to shine. Be your authentic self, to build genuine long term and mutually beneficial relationships with people.

Make sure you do enjoy the "experience" of networking to take advantage of its full effect for the success of you and your business.

Action Summary:

- Be aware of how your own life experiences can be a steppingstone for someone else.
- Have confidence to start a conversation. You can do it.
- Find a group that works for you and dedicate your time and energy to network consistently.
- Enjoy the experience. Have fun and aim for a blend of social and business interactions.

Chapter Three

T is for Trust.

What encourages you to place your trust in an individual or a business?

How do you choose their business over another?

Why do you trust them?

Before you enter into an agreement with an individual or business do you ask yourself these or similar questions? Placing your trust in someone is one of the most important business decisions you will make; one which determines either a positive or negative outcome for you or your business.

Wrong decisions can prove to be disastrous, being costly to both your business and your reputation. On the other hand, the right decision can boost your buying and selling power, ultimately leading to other people having confidence in you and your business.

Consider the decisions you make when you buy a new car. What do you look for? Naturally, your decision will be based on personal choice and individual need however there is no doubt there will be one standard element: reliability. Reliability: to make it affordable, to build confidence in the manufacturer, and to measure your expectations.

What is an alternative word for reliability? Trust.

Does the measure of reliability sound familiar to your business dealings? Do you look for affordability, confidence in another's business to determine your expectations? Without finding answers to these key areas, how can you build trust in someone?

Develop Trust.

The format of networking is based upon conversations and discussions. It's a face to face way for you to get to know more about an individual. As you start to network with people over a period of time, a sense of reliability develops between you. Being reliable constitutes the development of trust. It indicates a level of commitment between two people who wish to pursue and build a business relationship.

Being reliable says to someone that you are not just a "fly by night" person networking for a quick fix; to do business, secure a deal and be off.

You are here for the long haul; to discover what type of working relationship you can build, what type of business you have the potential to do together, or how you can refer business opportunities on.

People may say that anyone can “promise the world” in a conversation and that “talk is cheap”. This may be the case in your experience. In life, there will be people who are in business for quick results, whose aim is to make as much money as they can in the shortest possible time. Does this type of approach inspire trust for you? On face value, are you inclined to respect or have confidence in them? Being aware of unsavoury business deals or scams is vital. I say, with confidence, that in general, these types of businesspeople have not made an appearance at networking events I have attended. However online, is another matter.

Great Expectations.

As you network it is important to measure your expectations. Consider what you want to achieve from the business relationships you build. Successful networking comes from a give and take relationship. Do not expect the earth from someone if you are not prepared to contribute yourself.

Relationships take effort from both sides, to develop a unique combination of the ‘sure thing’, a deal you can both rely, bank, or count on. Clear expectations are a must. This will enable both parties to have full confidence about how the relationship will progress.

As well, measuring your expectations develops confidence in you and your business. It outlines your convictions and principles and positions you as an individual with integrity. In other words, you create respect.

Having confidence in an individual is a high priority for business owners and organisations.

Believing in an individual and their product or service through the exchange of networking can further enhance the development of successful partnerships.

Build a Reputation.

It cannot be disputed that good reputations are built on trust. Networking promotes the growth of trust, helping to build your credibility in the face of potential business opportunities. The more someone gets to know who you are and that you can deliver on your word, or hears rave reviews about your previous business performance, your reputation naturally moves in an upward direction.

People like to do business with someone who is trustworthy and reliable. This provides a certainty that a contract will be completed effectively and on time.

Networking can help you to become recognised as a thought-leader or expert, as you become the go-to person or super-connector, networkers flock to for advice in your field.

At this level you can elevate yourself to a position of influence and value, as someone who upholds high principles and inspires confidence in your business service or product.

When you network effectively to build a strong reputation, the respect and trust you gain will be based on a mixture of knowledge sharing and experience, with a link to positive responses to feedback received.

Action Summary:

- Ask a set of key questions before entering a business agreement.
- Commit to building long-term relationships that deliver on the promises made.
- Do not expect more from someone than you are willing to give yourself.
- Build your reputation as an expert through sharing advice, having authority, maintaining high principles, and promoting confidence in your product or service.

Chapter Four

W is for Win.

How do you feel when you win something in business? Do you feel proud of your achievement, pleased that you have gained success over a competitor, or do you simply enjoy basking in the glory of recognition for a job well done? Each one of us reacts differently to winning. Some individuals thrive on public recognition and praise, while others privately accept a personal achievement and carry on.

In this chapter we will look at two forms of winning in relation to networking. Firstly, the concept of winning business and how networking you can help you achieve great results. Secondly, the idea of creating a win: win situation for both you and your clients.

Present the Best You

Networking offers you an ideal opportunity to develop your confidence and presentation skills. As a first timer to any networking event you may feel nervous and unsure of how to present your impact speech or elevator pitch to a room full of complete strangers. Do not worry, you are not alone.

Many experienced networkers often feel nervous just before they stand up and present. Presenting with confidence takes preparation and practice. It is about knowing what you want to say and saying it in a confident manner.

To present with impact, make sure you:

- Relax and take a deep breath.
- Smile at your audience.
- Do not over rehearse and sound prescriptive.
- Ask questions of your audience to engage and intrigue their thinking.
- Present the Why/benefits not the features of your product or service (people want to know what's in it for them and how you can help solve their challenges).

Be yourself when you present your business. Each one of us adopts an individual style to suit the person that we are. There is no point putting across an image of someone you are not. Being honest and genuine is essential to help you feel more relaxed and confident as you speak.

Through my years of networking, I have often noticed both newbies and experienced networkers who, as sole traders or one man bands, pitch themselves as 'we' rather than 'I'. Being a curious networker, I have asked why they take this approach. In response, several of them say, "I want to look bigger than I am. I want to create a bigger presence than just being a solo businessperson." When I have enquired further, this approach

stems from their corporate days when they were in a team situation and talked about the company as a group.

The transition to working for yourself, after a career in the corporate world, is an adjustment. You shift from a team to being single. Naturally when you meet people and talk about your business, you want to create a strong and lasting impression. However, when you pitch yourself as 'we', the person you are speaking to will be left with the impression that you are in fact part of a larger organisation.

My advice – share the authentic you as a sole trader. Each time you network get into the habit of dropping the 'we' and using an 'I'. When you do this, you will build deeper level of trust which can lead to promising outcomes.

People buy people or more so the feeling they get from them. You are more likely to do business with someone you like and know rather than a stranger. Therefore, your style of presenting needs to create real impact on the people you speak to; to evoke a "feeling".

But it is not just about a feeling. Be seen and be consistent in your efforts to grow your business through networking. Regular attendance promotes goodwill and develops trust and credibility in you and your business.

Present your business with purpose. This is your business formed from an idea you believe in wholeheartedly. Networking is your chance to share your purpose, your WHY, with a wider audience. Deliver your unique message to grab attention, inspire interest, create desire, and spark a call to action.

Within your message make sure you promote the benefits of your product or service. People intrinsically want to know 'What is in it for me?' Will your product or service make a difference to their life i.e. save money or save time? Present your unique selling point (USP) in an engaging way, to capture the attention of your audience and ignite a desire in them to want to find out more.

Ask for the Business.

When you combine the elements, we have discussed, you place yourself in a better position to win business with the people with whom you network. Practice makes perfect is the ideal scenario however networking is more about developing your questioning and listening skills to achieve more from your client meetings.

The more often you network, the more often you should reflect on the power of the connections you are building. Think about where your network discussions are going, what you are getting from them, and whether they are leading toward a sale.

By consistently networking to build relationships and win business, you will continue to develop key skills such as listening, questioning, confidence, and negotiation. When you ask the right questions as you position yourself with a prospective client,

your aim is to discover the specific area of challenge they are facing. When the area of challenge is revealed, this is your chance to add value to the conversation by sharing your solution as the answer to their problem. Using the sales technique of pull vs push, you can gain greater rewards when you ask for the business. Before jumping in to seal the deal, make sure you have listened carefully to their responses to ensure you can deliver what they need, not what you think they need.

Network with purpose but keep an open mind to opportunities as they present themselves. Strive for the achievement of a winning performance.

Win: Win All Round

In the previous chapter we talked about the idea of giving and receiving in networking. This effective method of reciprocity as you do business promotes a win: win outcome for both parties. You share insights and offer helpful advice and expertise with someone who reciprocates. In effect, you both assist the growth of each other's individual business.

Networking provides an ideal platform for win: win situations.

At an event you gain knowledge and experience from purposeful conversations with others. In turn you impart your knowledge and expertise to benefit another. Be careful however that your helpful advice is not taken for granted. Some people may only be in networking to gather free advice and great ideas. You will soon discover who they are.

Commonly, networkers are willing to participate in the creation of mutually beneficial outcomes.

Who would not want to grow their business, themselves, and their reputation? Networking helps you develop the very useful skill of listening. By actively listening to another person you will learn to recognise potential opportunities. These may be ways in which you can combine your skills and talents to diversify your business or to introduce a new product or service. Together you create a win: win situation.

Think outside the box, listen, and be prepared for opportunities. Be proactive and helpful to build and sustain productive two way business relationships.

Action Summary:

- Deliver an elevator pitch which creates an impact.
- Ask open questions and listen carefully to the responses to ensure you win the business and deliver what the customer needs.
- Concentrate on building effective relationships that work for both parties.

Chapter Five

O is for Opportunity.

If someone told you there are countless opportunities available through networking, would you believe them? Surely the only opportunities for your business are those that specifically cater to your unique business needs? This may be true. However, are you are limiting yourself to a wealth of missed opportunities?

It is often said that opportunities are right in front of us however we do not always see or realise them immediately. If we did, business growth and personal development would simply be a piece of cake.

Let us look at the format of networking. How does networking promote opportunities? When you begin to network within a new group you do not know who you will meet and how they can help you and your business. As you continue to network you keep meeting new individuals; people with experience, knowledge and expertise.

Raise your business profile. Become a regular networker and grow both your reputation and your profile. Seize the opportunity to present your business. Share helpful advice to raise awareness of you and your business.

Together with meeting new people, networking also encourages the growth of existing relationships. The more you get to know someone, the more you discover things about them and their business.

Do you see a pattern emerging here, a journey of discovery toward unlimited possibilities?

Are you ready to grasp opportunities to progress you and your business?

Be Prepared

What is an opportunity? An opportunity is a chance, a break, an opening, or a prospect. It can be someone or something to take you and/or your business forward. It can be your time to flourish and bloom – you choose.

Are you ready to see an opportunity?

Opportunities present themselves sometimes when you least expect it. Being ready for and knowing how to spot them is what it is all about. Or you can adopt an opportunistic approach and create opportunities. Be brave and ask.

Here is one of the best pieces of business advice I ever received: "Always ask because it gives them a chance to say YES." Using this tactic takes courage. It pushes you beyond

your zone of comfort, into the space where your magic happens. It encourages you to build confidence and adopt a Can Do attitude to pulling opportunities toward your business. Having successfully made use of this advice on countless occasions, I say to you – give it a go. What is the worst that can happen?

Being successful in business is about being prepared.

It is about being prepared for opportunities, or for problems and setbacks. Of course, you cannot be prepared for everything that takes place because you and I do not own a crystal ball.

For established business owners, cast your mind back to when you started in business. If you are just starting out in business, what is your plan? What are your aims and ambitions? What do you want your business to achieve for you, personally and professionally? What is your vision of where you will be in 1, 5 or 10 years?

What is Stopping You?

Making a list of your goals and objectives provides you with a guide for your business. This focus paints a picture in your mind of your destination. The development of your business can be likened to travelling on a journey toward a destination.

A journey typically starts at point A and finishes at point B. Along the way a journey may change. There may be obstacles such as diversions which may slow you down, force or gift you a chance to alter your course. In business, obstacles do occur, so it is important to have an idea of how you will get from A to B. Consider what you may need to do to make allowances for a change during your business.

Examples include:

- Have a financial cushion/cash flow to cover unforeseen situations.
- Identify training opportunities to build knowledge in areas where you may need to improve or refine the skills you require to grow and sustain your business.
- Maintain a quality database of close contacts for help, support, and advice, when faced by challenges.

What happens when you are faced with an obstacle? At first an obstacle may appear to block your path however is the obstacle an opportunity. Do not be too quick to dismiss it.

Set aside time to reflect on what is happening in your business, how you are feeling, and create a plan of action for you can do.

- Are you doing too much or too little of something?
- Do you need to review your marketing approach?

- Is this an opportunity to look at your business with a fresh set of eyes or to change your way of thinking?
- Is it time to stop limiting yourself?

Think of your business journey as a series of stages. Set easy to achieve goals and take one step at a time. Each step leads to progress and the possible discovery of new opportunities along the way. Remember, small steps lead to big success.

Working from Home

Most small business owners work from home. Working from a spare room in your house is cost effective compared to renting office space and having to commute to an office. The home working environment is often based on lifestyle choice, to fit in with family commitments.

We have seen a huge shift toward working from home, due to global crises, digitisation, and a rise in flexible work options for self-employed and employed workers. As we know, there are significant advantages to being a home based worker. However, there are numerous downsides as well, including internet band width, workspace restrictions, childcare commitments, and personal boundaries to manage wellbeing, to name a few.

For the sole trader, before you chose to work from home, what type of environment did you work in? A busy office filled with many staff? A place where you could speak to someone about a problem, concern or issue you might have had? Now that you are at home, working solo, to whom do you turn for advice or simply to have a chat?

Networking is a great outlet because it gives you an opportunity to talk to other likeminded individuals, to discuss ideas and issues, but most of all it provides you with human contact. Humans are social creatures who thrive on interaction and networking is one platform for you to achieve this.

Online networking has seen exponential growth and rising popularity over the past few years, particularly during the current global crisis.

My advice for you is, do not permit yourself to get stuck at home with a head full of ideas or problems. Join an online or face to face networking group near you, get talking, feel human, build connections, gain knowledge, and discover solutions to progress you and your business.

Give yourself an opportunity to discover which style of networking suits you best. Do you prefer the real life human connection with face to face conversations or taking part in an online Zoom session with breakout rooms to network and chat through discussion points? Work out the right blend for you and your business.

Action Summary:

- Raise your business profile by looking for opportunities.
- Always think outside the box.
- List, review and measure your goals and objectives regularly.
- Build a contingency plan for unforeseen changes in business.
- Find a networking style (online or offline) that provides you with human interaction and a positive opportunity to share business ideas and issues, as opposed to being stuck inside four walls.

Chapter Six

R is for Rapport.

Building a good rapport is vital before you enter into any business agreement with another individual. Why?

Back in Chapter 4 we talked about people buying the feeling they get from other people. Feelings provide a foundation for you to start developing a rapport with an individual or groups of people. Think about how this happens when you network. When people meet they either begin to “like” or “dislike” the feeling they get from someone. Next, they usually make a choice; to get to know you or to move on. By choosing to build on a “feeling”, they decide to proceed and develop a relationship.

Make a Connection.

To achieve the most for your business through building a positive rapport with others, your aim is to focus on creating and sustaining positive relationships. It is the power of these relationships that can assist you in so many ways, from business start-up advice to personal development and marketing. As you network you will meet a variety of professional individuals and businesses each offering a unique range of opportunities for you and your business.

How do you build a rapport?

You ask questions and get to know someone. Ask open questions to find out about them, their business and what they offer. Listen to the other person’s needs and see how you can help them achieve their goals. This may take the form of an offer of your own services or the suggestion of another business service.

As you network, you are in the process of creating bonds and links, to bring together a whole range of services to be available at your disposal. By creating a vast network, you build an associate group of business colleagues and advisors, to whom you can turn for advice, assistance, and business.

Making a connection through networking helps to create an understanding between businesses of attention to each other’s needs, which can set you on the right road of successful growth for your business.

Put in a Good Word

Picture this scenario. From one of your networking groups, you like the feeling you get from the conversations you have had with Sophie, the owner of Word Perfect VA. However, before you decide to explore further, engage the services of, or ask for the

business, how do you know what Sophie's service is really like? Does Sophie meet deadlines? What is her level of customer service? Who has Sophie previously delivered work to? How will you find answers to the questions you have?

Recommendations or referrals play a significant role in networking. Many networking groups I have attended have adopted this system as their primary method of operation. By recommending or referring you actively promote someone else's business and vice versa. Reciprocity strikes again. This is a win: win for both businesses and is a positive way to generate business leads.

Being recommended is in effect a seal of approval. It is one way of saying, "A job well done".

The seal of approval is an indication to other businesses that you are a professional who provides a high standard of quality service. Earning this accolade stands as testament to an individual having built a rock-solid reputation. It is my preference to engage the business services of someone with good credentials and a strong reputation. What about you?

Within networking, recommendations continue to prove to be an effective way to do business. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, it is your aim to build an associate network of businesspeople to whom you can call, to manage your mindset and wellbeing, and your business. This makes perfect business sense as it saves you time and money and acts as an endorsement of each other's services. In effect you support and maintain a group of professionals who share an affinity and trust relationship.

What encourages someone to recommend you?

Delivering first class customer service places you in a more favourable position to be recommended by another business. Why?

When you delight your customer, you provide them with a total experience, from start to finish and beyond.

You take care of their individual needs, meet their deadlines, and go that extra mile. Your service makes them feel that they are the most important customer in the world.

As you network and develop your business relationships, you will discover many businesses who deliver an "experience" to their customers. Imagine how much success you will bring to your business when you recommended another's fantastic service. Your customer will be delighted, and your credibility will increase.

What can you learn from or be inspired to change in your business to improve your service? Being recommended time and time again raises your brand awareness and credibility. Not only will you build a great reputation, but you will also be

acknowledged as a thought-leader in your niche area of expertise, as a specialist who delivers invaluable advice and excellent customer service.

Action Summary:

- People buy into the feeling they get from others.
- Always endeavour to build a positive rapport.
- Deliver an exceptional experience to your clients to be referred repeatedly.
- Delight your clients and exceed their expectations.
- Build a reputable business from referrals.

Chapter Seven

K is for Knowledge.

It is vital to view networking as a positive learning experience. Each time you meet a new individual or as you extend the existing relationships you have built with regular networkers, there is an opportunity to learn something new.

Daily in business, your aim is to learn something completely new.

Life is all about learning and you can never know all there is to know. Without learning, how do you make mistakes and learn from them, improve, and grow yourself on a personal and professional level, to become an outstanding businessperson and human being.

If you are like me, a self-confessed book addict and voracious learner, the opportunity to constantly learn, provides nourishment for my mind, body, soul, and business.

Many people say that knowledge is power. In relation to networking we can interpret knowledge as the sharing of information and experience to benefit ourselves and others. It is about sharing information to help others solve problems, enhance business opportunities and to develop strong and lasting working relationships. However the sharing of information should not be forced upon people in a dominant way. As learning is about discovery, so too is the sharing of wisdom and experience. Do not force your lifetime of business knowledge at every opportunity. Participate in conversations where you share and listen to gain knowledge equally.

Awareness and Understanding.

Knowledge in networking can also be likened to the development of understanding.

Learning to recognise and understand peoples' needs is important. If you are an experienced networker, facilitate conversations with newcomers and start up business owners where you seek to find out specific areas or issues that may concern them.

As you demonstrate your awareness of their needs and possible lack of business experience, they will see you as an understanding and knowledgeable person. These individuals will develop a positive perception of your patience and understanding and will see you as a valuable business contact. Your approach can encourage them to ask you personally for advice at challenging and winning times within their business.

Be Seen as an Expert

As an experienced businessperson, the value you bring to networking when you share your wisdom and knowledge can be one of the greatest benefits to other businesses and individuals.

When you think about successful businesses and businesspeople across the globe, what is one thing that helps them continue to be successful?

Experience. Over many years in business these people have learnt from experience, wisdom, learning and advice, for the best ways to manage and sustain their own business. Consider what you can offer others as you network? How can you help them grow?

What happens to you as your business grows?

You keep learning. You experience positives and negatives. You become better at what you do or provide. You become an expert in your field. Why? Because you learn from experience. When something works you keep doing it, and when it does not, you learn from the experience and move forward.

As you share information with others, you have the potential to further another's knowledge and enhance the development of an essential set of business skills to help progress their business to another level.

Be seen as someone who offers helpful advice and expertise.

Remember you were once in their shoes and may have struggled along the way, learning as your business grew. Encourage individuals to learn, to gain knowledge, and together, you can forge prosperous business relationships.

Action Summary:

- Participate in conversations where you share knowledge equally.
- Engage newcomers in conversation with experienced networkers.
- Add value and enhance the development of business skills.
- Encourage individuals to progress their business.

Chapter Eight

I is for Inspiration.

Who or what inspires you in business?

Gaining inspiration to be creative, to work on an idea and make a business advance is undoubtedly a process that many people will experience or have experienced. Inspiration pushes you forward, it encourages you to keep going, and it builds momentum, ultimately leading to a personal or professional achievement or reward for you.

Inspiration can be represented in a variety of ways. As unique individuals some of us will discover inspiration in nature, while others will be inspired by philosophers, writers, artists and musicians. Even the greatest minds together with the most highly successful people on the planet have all been inspired by someone or something. How else would discoveries have been made, ideas thought of and masterpieces created?

We are all unique in our thoughts and feelings and how we are inspired is highly individual.

What can inspiration do? Inspiration stimulates the development of ideas, and ignites creativity, bright ideas, and flashes of thought.

How can networking provide inspiration for you?

Be Inspired for Success.

Think about the people that you have met in business who have inspired you to desire greater personal achievement, to improve yourself, or to help you find rediscover your focus or direction. How did they inspire you? Was it in the way they presented themselves, or an interesting piece of information, or the choice of words they used? Was it because of their individual achievements? Did you feel energised and get a "buzz" from your experience?

A common sign of a successful networking event is from the energy generated.

This energy can be the result of one person or the collective group. In my experience, many people have commented how energised they felt from a meeting. The 'buzz' they feel sets them up for the day. What a powerful reaction as a result to being part of a group of people.

How would you like to experience this uplifting, feelgood factor too?

Being energised gives you a warm and fuzzy feeling inside. Even after a networking meeting or event you continue to hold onto a high energy feeling. Imagine what this feeling can lead to - the generation of new ideas, a new process in your business, or a new approach to dealing with your customers?

Energy allows you to unleash your creativity with a fantastic mix of fresh thoughts and innovations and encourages you to act on established ideas.

Stay Motivated

How can staying motivated help you and your business? Motivation inspires you to keep going, to maintain a level of commitment, and to stay focussed on what you want to achieve. Without motivation the process stops. No progress is made and your business plans and dreams can lose momentum.

When you network on a regular basis you begin to take steps to motivate yourself.

Networking helps you surround yourself with likeminded and positive people. You enter into a mindset of individuals who thrive on creating a force of energy together, which in turn sustains and motivates you to continue. Achieve more when you network consistently.

Here is a set of motivational tips to get you started:

- 1. Believe in yourself and follow your gut feeling.** Have confidence in your instinct and when something feels right, go for it.
- 2. Challenge yourself to do and be better.** Put effort in to achieve the results you desire.
- 3. List your goals.** Focus on one goal at a time. Take bite sized, easy to digest chunks to reach and smash your goals.
- 4. Manage your time wisely.** Focus on being productive to avoid overburdening your workload with too many tasks.
- 5. Leave your troubles at the door.** Stop making excuses and take action to make things happen.

6. Always deliver the best experience. Go an extra mile for your customers.

When you apply these tips, with regularly networking, they can guide you to maintain focus and stay on track with the development and growth of your business.

Action Summary:

- Identify what inspires you to be creative and make it your focus to stimulate the development of creative ideas.
- Take the buzz you gain from a networking event and turn it into action to energise you and your business.
- Believe in yourself and follow your gut feeling.
- Challenge yourself to do and be better.
- Manage your time wisely. Aim for productive best to deliver your BEST WORK.

Chapter Nine

N is for Nurture.

We have talked extensively in previous chapters about how networking is about fostering mutually beneficial relationships. Take any relationship, be it personal or professional, and you will no doubt agree that there are several key elements that contribute to making it a success. One element is to nurture, to tend and to take care of. Through networking, the nurturing approach you take means you need to look after each other but more importantly to connect to truly make a relationship work.

How does your Business Grow?

Let's look at the analogy of a plant in relation to building and maintaining effective networking relationships.

A plant begins as a seed. The ground, made rich with compost or soil, is prepared to ensure the seed is given a strong foundation as it begins to germinate. The seed is sown into a well prepared bed. Next the ground is watered to encourage the seed to commence a journey upward toward the sunlight and air. Regular watering takes place to feed the ground and to create ideal conditions for the seed to grow.

Soon the seed breaks through the surface of the soil, to soak up its first rays of sunlight and feel the soft drops of water on its stalk. With the young plant visible, it requires regular tending to ensure good growth. With sunlight, water and fertiliser the young plant grows taller and stronger, branches develop and shoots begin to appear. The plant requires continuous care, support, and encouragement to grow bigger and bigger, with regular watering and feeding.

Unexpectedly, the plant becomes out of control. The plant is not taken care of on a regular basis. Branches suddenly sprout from everywhere. The plant becomes a tangled mess and needs a good trim. Why? To strengthen the plant's strong core and to encourage steady growth.

With the deadwood removed, the plant shows signs of relief, as a benefit of being nurtured again. Soon, buds appear on the branches. The buds turn into flowers which blossom in abundance. As a result of care, attention and support the seed becomes a healthy and flourishing plant that blooms beautifully, season after season.

When you reflect on the journey of your business, what similarities do you see, to the growth of a plant?

Wind your mind back to when you first started in business. Like a seed, you planted your business idea. However, before the planting, you prepared the ground through research and advice.

Your business idea was cultivated with help and advice from respected connections, being fed and watered to form a solid foundation and to encourage growth. As your business began to take shape from infancy, to whom did you turn for support, development, growth, and success?

Making the decision to join a networking group allows you to take care of your personal and business needs.

Networking develops you. You benefit from the support of others as they nurture and help you develop your idea into a healthy and well respected business. Along your networking journey you will meet people who will share invaluable experience and advice to assist with your business development.

Feel like your business is getting out of control? Are you going in too many different directions? Need to make changes and refocus on the core elements of your business? Do your branches need a good pruning?

Networking can help you keep your business on track.

As you build effective relationships the trust you develop helps you choose the right people to ask for advice. By demonstrating support and encouragement, these people will guide you along the best path to avoid your business from getting out of control. Your trusted network will look after your business needs and help you stay in focus.

When you remove the deadwood in your business you encourage new growth.

New opportunities will appear like the buds on the plant. The strength of your business relationships will be reflected in this next stage of development. As a result of asking questions, listening, discussing, and learning, new opportunities will become visible. Through networking your new opportunities can take your business forward to help you thrive and be prosperous.

Action Summary:

- Nurture your personal and professional needs.
- Be accountable and keep your business on track.
- Aim to keep ahead of the curve to sustain business growth and success.

Chapter Ten

G is for Growth.

To grow is to seek knowledge, to learn, to discover and to progress.

Networking brings together these fundamentals of growth to assist in the advancement of both your personal and professional development. Within this book, we have covered a multitude of aspects about networking from interacting with others, buying the “feeling” you get from someone, to discovering and learning from experience, winning business, gaining inspiration, achieving great results from meetings, and ways to build effective business relationships. Ultimately, growth is the culmination of these aspects.

Personal Development

From the first time you network, you begin to grow as an individual.

Do you remember your first networking experience? Did you feel nervous and unsure about how to present yourself? Did you lack the confidence to walk up to a stranger and start a conversation with them?

Are you a wannabe networker and have yet to dip your toe in the water? Give networking a go. Find a group, sign up to attend and go along, online, or offline. I guarantee, you will be warmly welcomed by people who want to get to know you and help you and your business.

When we look at personal growth, networking provides you with an opportunity to improve your confidence, as you present your business to an audience, to unleash your creativity and imagination, and to be seen as a reliable professional with integrity.

Regular attendance to any networking group allows you to polish and refine your personal skills such as confidence and presentation. Even experienced public speakers continue to learn from repeat performances. Practice makes perfect after all.

The relationships you build from networking, will enhance your personal development, however, networking is not just about business relationships.

Personally, I, like many businesspeople I know, develop longstanding friendships, and share the successes and trials of both personal and professional life. Strong bonds and links are forged. Combined, these factors will elevate your personal growth, by advancing you and your business to a new level.

Professional Development

What value do you place on listening to and learning from another's experience?

From the conversations you have as you network, you will make incredible discoveries. Because networking covers such a broad spectrum of people their combined knowledge is priceless. Different experiences paint a much wider picture of business and how it all works.

To help your business grow and flourish, networking can generate a collective and trusted support circle of business connections.

This powerful support circle promotes improved productivity and effectiveness for you to take your business forward. Consider the potential outcomes: business expansion, more staff, enhanced professional development, or increased profits. Your possibilities are endless.

Business growth and success through networking is determined by the way you respond to and embark on your journey.

When you began your journey, you chose networking as an opportunity to transform your business ideas into a process to achieve your business goals. As you progressed in business, changes happened, and you grew as a result.

Such growth can be seen as an evolution; your personal evolution bringing your aims, ambitions, goals, and aspirations to fruition.

Networking - **E**xperience – **T**rust
Win – **O**pportunity – **R**apport
Knowledge – **I**nspiration – **N**urture
Growth

Top Tips for Successful Networking

1. **Be You.** Project your authentic self to create the right presence to build strong connections and a trusted network.
2. **Be Curious.** Be prepared to step beyond your comfort zone into the zone where your magic happens. Armed with an explorer mindset, ask questions, listen deeply, add value, and win business.
3. **Make a Commitment.** Once you complete a test drive of networking groups to unearth your ideal audience, show up regularly. Find the right group for you to learn, be inspired, inspire others, and grow.
4. **Have Fun.** Enjoy yourself and allow your personality to shine. Networking is not just about serious business talk. Lighten the conversation as you build your confidence.
5. **Be Open.** View networking as an adventure where you will connect with new people for the first time. Whether you are a first timer or experienced networker, an open approach gives you a wider perspective to meet people and explore conversations.
6. **Lead with Reciprocity.** Networking is about giver's gain. When you lead with reciprocity, the ROI can be tenfold. Become known as a super-connector who elevates others to toward success.
7. **Ignite your Growth.** Networking is the ideal platform for you to develop and grow yourself on a personal and professional level through learning new skills, knowledge, and techniques etc.
8. **Achieve Success.** Through networking we achieve the greatest success when we help others. We achieve success when we are rewarded by winning the business.

Meet the Author: Gail Gibson

Known as the Can Do coach, award-winning master performance coach, international speaker, podcast host, and author, Gail Gibson, delivers a unique style of 'Can Do' coaching with proven results in enabling her clients to break through the frustration of stagnant or unfulfilled personal and professional growth. The simple, yet incredibly effective coaching techniques she has honed and developed, have led to life-changing transformations in mindset, and personal performance for business and corporate leaders in the UK, US, Australia, and Asia.



A published author (*Making Connections: How to Network Effectively to Build Better Business Relationships*, 2009; *The Rise of SEE-19© Leadership: See Beyond and Become the Leader You Are Born to Be*, 2021; *The Working Woman's Guide to Menopause: When the Heat is On. Don't Sweat It*, 2021) and inspirational speaker on mindset, peak personal performance, and SEE-19© Leadership.

Gail hosts an uplifting weekly podcast, *The Can Do Way*, featuring guests from across the globe who share amazing stories of growth, resilience, and success.

A self-confessed book addict and voracious learner, green tea drinker, and a lover of keeping fit in the great outdoors – her 'green' gym.

"Networking has proved to be a successful and cost-effective marketing tool to help progress my business. Having hosted and participated in a variety of networking and speaking events across the globe, I have met many amazing people who have inspired my work and my personal development. Through networking I have connected and nurtured relationships, on a social and business level, delivered work with and for numerous contacts, become a super-connector to help others succeed, and developed a strong sense of awareness of opportunities as they present themselves. After 16 years in business, networking remains as my favourite business tool through which I continue to connect, learn, nurture, support, and grow, personally, professionally, and reciprocally, and achieve winning results."

Gail Gibson, 2021

What's Next

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