



TURNINGPOINT QUARTERLY TALENT REPORT (Q4 2016)

The Art of Networking: Creating Success Through the
Power of Relationships



Why Networking

Ernst & Young (EY) recently announced their plans to [hire 15,000 new employees](#) in the next year. They expect more than half of those hires to come from employee referrals. If you want to join the \$30 billion company, then knowing an insider improves your odds.

Stories like this are not uncommon. In fact, nine of the 10 employees at TurningPoint were hired based on referrals. Moreover, networking and referrals continue to be a significant source of revenue for most small companies (more than 45% at TurningPoint). Bottom line: a direct referral, introduction or connection can improve your success rate. That's because people are more likely to do business with people they know, like, and trust. When you master the art of networking, you're more visible, likable, and credible.

OK, but do I have to? I hate networking.

Some (*ahem, extroverts*) thrive in social interactions. Others shy away—seeing it as unnecessary, inauthentic and in some cases, dirty.

But hiding under a rock isn't a viable option these days. There's plenty of research showing the benefits of professional networks—from increasing business opportunities to building your reputation and authority. Plus, quality professional relationships often improve job satisfaction and the quality of your work.

Did You Know?

In a recent Sales & Marketing Leadership Alliance survey, more than 30% of members closed new business as a direct result of networking within the group.

Proof positive that building and sustaining relationships counts!

Learn to Love Networking

Your negative perceptions about networking may be rooted in some common myths. Fortunately, you may be surprised to discover that you're already a networking pro and just didn't know it.

Myth #1: Networking is only for people who need a job or want to make a sale.

"You had me at 'Hello.'"

Wouldn't it be nice if the first "hello" landed you a new career or business opportunity? In most cases, it won't. Few relationships develop overnight. If you're waiting for the sky to fall before you start networking, then you're taking the wrong approach. By then it may be too late.

Think of yourself as a farmer. Farmers prepare the soil, plant the seeds, water consistently, then wait—patiently. Networking is similar. You prepare yourself, connect with people, develop relationships, and eventually your network bears fruit.

Myth #2: Networking is slimy.

Admittedly, there are some unsophisticated networkers out there. You walk into a room full of strangers and within minutes you're accosted by a slick, salesly-type. A business card is shoved in your hand, a fake smile is offered, and you've been slimed.

Experiences like this create the misconception that networking is inherently gross, selfish, and manipulative. You can't always avoid these unscrupulous networkers. But you can reframe your perspective so it feels “cleaner.” You'll find strategies for doing this in the next section of this report, but for now read on for the next myth.

Myth #3: Only extroverts are good at networking.

Networking is intimidating for everyone, even some extroverts. The idea that you must be a natural “people person” to build a strong professional network is untrue. As is the idea that networking is about constantly meeting new people, which tends to cause the most anxiety (“Stranger danger!”).

Although networking is a people-oriented activity, it's also an individual experience. That means you can create it in a way that best suits your personality and goals.

Myth #4: Networking takes too much time.

There's no way to get around it. Building relationships take time. There are no overnight successes. Instead, consistent action over time builds visibility, likability, and credibility. You must be committed to developing relationships to grow a powerful network.

The upside is that you can develop your network in as little as 15 minutes a day! In fact, you may already be networking but calling it something else. For example, when you interact with other parents at your son's soccer game, you're networking. When you engage in a casual conversation waiting in line at Starbucks, you're networking. When you're taking a group exercise class at your gym, you're networking.

Networking is already a part of your everyday life! You simply need to look at it from a different angle and apply some structure to your process so you get the most out of it.

Myth #5: The more people I know the better networked I am.

There's a common adage that says, “it's not what you know, it's who you know.” This belief may lead you think of networking as a numbers game. But focusing on arbitrarily adding people to your network won't improve your success rate.

Malcolm Gladwell drives this point perfectly in his best-selling book *The Tipping Point*. In it, Gladwell describes the “law of the few”, which builds off Pareto's 80/20 principle. When applied to your professional network, 80 percent of new opportunities come from 20 percent of your contacts.

TurningPoint CEO and founder Ken Schmitt discovered this early in his firm's growth. “Initially, I attempted to plant my flag wherever I could—attending upwards of 15 events every month for the first few years. But I realized that I couldn't be all things to all people. A more effective long-term strategy was to focus on building a solid, deep, and more concentrated network. I created a niche in recruiting sales and marketing leadership. This led to rebranding the firm and ultimately, exponential growth in a few short years.”

Power Tip: Don't be Slimy

When JP LaBarrie, a Sr. Enterprise Business Consultant for Cox Business, attends a professional networking event he focuses on developing relationships, not closing a sale.

“I never want to come off as too salesy. No one wants to be sold. So I avoid talking about my products and get to know people first.”

LaBarrie used this approach at the 2016 Dynamic Disruption event, connecting with one of the conference speakers who eventually became a customer.

The Mindset of a Networker

In our interviews with well-networked sales and marketing leaders, we found four common characteristics that set them apart. They share a mindset that enables them to improve the quality and strength of their professional network.

Mindset #1: I'm curious.

“So, what do you do?”

You've heard the question asked hundreds of times. Asking questions shows a sense of curiosity, but this one is over-used and uncomfortable.

The person on the receiving end is put in a position to quickly describe his or her value—which is likely a lifetime of work—in a few seconds. And you're eagerly awaiting a response to quickly assess whether the person is worth your time. It's a no-win situation!

One way to quickly overcome this challenge is to engage your curiosity. Ask questions that help you understand who the person is, not just what they do. Remember, people do business with those they know, like, and trust. A person's vocation doesn't always provide a full picture of who they are as human beings.

Mindset #2: I'm willing.

Networking is hard. There, we said it.

That doesn't mean that networking isn't also fulfilling and enjoyable. But the act of connecting and relating with others, in many cases strangers, isn't always easy. Despite this, networking becomes more meaningful and effective when you come to with a certain level of willingness.

What must you be willing to do? Here are some ideas shared by clients and leaders we've interviewed:

- I'm willing to be vulnerable.
- I'm willing to be uncomfortable.
- I'm willing to see a different point of view.
- I'm willing to give without the expectation of a return.

Power Tip: Use Alternatives to the Dreaded Question

Tired of asking people, “What do you do?” Try these alternatives to switch it up!

- How did you get into your profession?
- What are you passionate about?
- What's the most exciting part about your work?
- Who have you met recently that inspired you?
- What do you enjoy doing outside of work?
- What's your all-time favorite quote or piece of advice?

Kimberly Toonen, a seasoned business development executive once known as the “Career Whisperer” during her tenure at Apple, recalls a time when she went left as everyone else in her industry was going right.

“As a senior executive at Cox Communications, a key to my success was being attuned to shifts in my industry. Most of my colleagues were attending networking events and conferences related to the telecomm industry. The assumption was that prospective clients would attend to learn about telecomm. I recognized that my future clients were likely to be land developers, so I decided to get involved in a building industry association instead.”

Toonen stepped outside of the comfort of her own industry to develop relationships in a market her peers ignored. For nine years she was an active member, joining not-so-exciting committees and attending the industry’s national conference. “I was the only telecomm executive in the room, which gave me tremendous exposure. Plus, I gained an insider view of their industry that eventually led to closing deals I might have never been exposed to before.”

Mindset #3: I listen first and well.

Contrary to what you may have been taught or experienced, communication isn’t all about getting your message across to others. The best communicators leverage a lesser used skill—listening.

In a room full of professional networkers, it can be rare to meet someone who truly listens. But when you do, it’s an experience you won’t forget. You’re finally seen, heard, and understood.

“You will get all you want in life, if you help enough other people get what they want.”

~Zig Ziglar

Imagine how you can transform your relationships by listening first and listening well. This means going beyond what you see and hear to capture the space between the words—the gestures, the change in inflection, or the general energy of the person speaking.

That’s what deep listeners do. They don’t think, “What’s in it for me?” but come to a conversation wondering, “What’s in it for them?” Deep listeners listen to learn. More important, they listen to add value and that can only happen when

you “seek first to understand, then to be understood¹.”

Mindset #4: I offer value.

When you’re successful in Mindset #3 then a natural outcome is delivering value to those around you. That’s because you’re attuned to the needs and interests of others. That knowledge puts you in a better position to give them what they want.

When you think about the value you offer, avoid thinking in terms of the product and service you sell or the result you want. Remember, no one likes to be sold. But everyone likes to have their problems solved.

Shift your perspective. Always ask: *What can I give?* not *What do I need?*

“Networking is like making bank deposits. Each time you take genuine and authentic action to grow relationships, you’re building network equity that you can draw on in the future. Be consistent with your deposits!”

~Kimberly Toonen, Former Business Development Executive and Small Business Advisor

¹ From *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey

Developing Your Networking Action Plan

We've debunked some common networking myths. You also discovered four essential mindsets of a successful networker. Now, let's put the pieces together into a simple five-step action plan.

Step 1. Know Your Why.

We've already established that building a strong professional network takes time. Make good use of it! Start by determining what you want to achieve. Think about **why** you want to network.

- Do you want to find new relationships or nurture existing ones?
- Are you looking to build a team or build support for an organization you support?
- Are you on the market for a new job or want to change careers?
- Is it important for you to improve your credibility and brand expertise?
- Are you seeking to increase your knowledge about a specific industry or market?

"You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with."

~ Jim Rohn

Brainstorm a list of reasons why you want to network, then rank your list in order of importance and urgency.

Step 2. Identify Your Style.

Building relationships isn't a one-size-fits-all endeavor. It's an activity that can be customized to your unique style. If you're not a fan of cold calls, then you don't need to make cold calls (unless, of course, that's a requirement of your job!). If you prefer to connect with others online, then there are plenty of opportunities for you to do so.

The key to effective networking is to be yourself. At the same time, be willing to stretch. Sometimes you must go outside of your comfort zone to get opportunities that you would normally be out of your reach.

If you want insights into your networking style, there are many assessments that can help such as Strengths Finder, Myers-Briggs, and DISC. You can even take a quick, no-cost assessment online at 16personalities.com².

Power Tip: Buddy Up!

Make networking more palatable (and fun!) by finding an accountability partner to share goals, wins, and setbacks. A buddy can also help ease the discomfort of walking into a room full of strangers.

Remember, don't stick together like super glue! The point is to meet and connect with *new* people.

Step 3. Determine Your Activity

Once you've identified why you want to build your network and you have a better sense of your personal style, it's time to decide on the action you will take.

Start small!

One of the pitfalls of networking is biting off more than you can realistically handle. Networking has value, but it can come at a cost if you're not mindful of your approach. Remember, networking takes an investment of time, money, and other resources. It's important to thoughtfully

² TurningPoint Executive Search is not affiliated with the 16personalities.com website and does not attest to the validity of the assessments. The site is offered as a resource for further exploration.

consider your goals and personal style alongside those available resources.

Here are some examples of networking activities you might commit to:

- Attend 2 networking events each month in 2017 and introduce myself to 3 new people each time
- Spend 1 hour a week reconnecting with 2 – 3 people in my LinkedIn network via private message to share something of value to them
- Become an active volunteer in a professional or non-profit organization by regularly attending member meetings, serving on committees, and offering my expertise for free
- Write 1 article a month that is posted on LinkedIn Pulse and my personal blog
- Send 1 handwritten note—thank you, anniversary, congratulations, etc.—to one person in my network each week
- Create a “hit list” of people and companies I want to connect with and use it to focus my networking activities

Power Tip: Create a quarterly networking calendar

Plan the events you’ll attend, the meetings you intend to schedule, and the contacts you want to reach in advance. Block the time and add your networking activities to your calendar!

You might even consider setting a specific focus each quarter to keep you on track and motivated.

Step 4. Prepare to Connect.

The best networkers are prepared to connect and it shows. That could be as simple as having business cards on hand at all times and a pen handy, too. “I have my business cards strategically placed—the glove box of my car, pockets of my jackets, or in my daily planner—so I’m never at a lost when someone asks, ‘May I have your card?’” says founder of Inciteful Communications Michele Richardson. You never know when or where you’ll meet someone who may become a valuable part of your network.

But planning ahead is more than having business cards ready to hand out. A critical part of preparation is identifying your personal brand. In other words, what are you known for? Even more telling is how others perceive you. You may discover that what you want to be known for is vastly differently than how you are currently perceived.

Ken’s 6 BE’s of Networking

BE Genuine

BE Valuable

BE Present

BE Consistent

BE Reliable

BE Planful

You can quickly take control of your personal brand by developing your online presence. You don’t need to buy a domain name and start a blog, though those steps may help. Start by updating your LinkedIn profile then keep it current. You may consider publishing articles though the platform’s Pulse network, too. Learn more about leveraging LinkedIn to build your brand and your network in Ken Schmitt’s new book [LinkedIn Hiring Secrets for Sales & Marketing Leaders: The Winning Formula for Attracting High Performers](#) available on Amazon.

Step 5. Take Action.

Don’t delay—go!

It's tempting to hide out in the first four steps of this action plan. You could refine and tweak your networking strategy forever. But avoid that temptation and get into action. You don't want to be the best kept secret in your industry, niche, or city, do you? Networking is your opportunity to go from invisible to visible!

As you begin taking action, take a quick scan of your plan:

- Have you adopted the mindset of a professional networker?
- Are the reasons you want to network still valid and important?
- Are you clear about your networking style—specifically, how to leverage your strengths and areas you might stretch out of your comfort zone?
- Have you established some clear, realistic, and actionable short-term goals for the next 3 months?
- Do you have an accountability partner to help you stay on track?

Yes, then go out and network!

Prepare a Quip in Your Hip

by Liz Goodgold of [RedFire Branding](#)

Successful networking takes planning, preparation, and follow-up. You need to know what you're going to wear—from having pockets to help manage business cards to wearing comfortable, flat shoes (Ladies, I'm talking to you!).

Most important, have a "quip in your hip," a concept I pioneered to give you the confidence to start a conversation even in those awkward moments of silence. Here's how it works: brainstorm 1 to 3 items of interest that can naturally continue a conversation while also bolstering your brand reputation. Look for topics with the greatest opportunity for commonalities to be found: entertainment, current events, sports, geography, and holiday plans.

Here's an example of a "quip in your hip" I used after recently relocating from San Diego to Orange County: "Whew! I'm so excited to be here; it's my first meeting in Orange County, having just left San Diego."

This is a great conversation starter because the next logical questions will likely be about why I moved, what I loved about San Diego, and my goals in OC.

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