

The Cycles of Networking®

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We live our lives in cycles. In business, there are busy times, down times and in-between times. These are repeated over and over. Even our bodies operate in cycles. One day we are the child, the next day we are parents of our own children, and all too soon, those children grow up and have children of their own and we enter our later years, our last physical cycle.

Just as there are cycles in the seasons, nature, retail sales, the economy, education, etc., there are cycles in networking. Relationships also have cycles. Because relationships are the heart of networking, we can easily see similarities between the cycles in relationships and the cycles in networking. Let's explore the cycles of networking as seen through the framework of relationships.

First Cycle: Making Contacts

The first cycle consists of making contacts. Whether you are searching for friends, a life partner or clients, you start by making contacts. Experienced networkers know they need to spend considerable effort placing themselves where they will be exposed to maximum contacts. This includes joining organizations, checking business calendars in the newspapers and attending meetings, making phone calls from productive lists, sending mailings, using e-mail, etc. The "dating game" in networking takes just as much time, energy and planning as it does to find a life partner.

Second Cycle: Selection Process

In the second cycle, you spend time selecting and de-selecting people. Not every contact will become a client, partner or resource. This is the time to sort through all of your contacts and identify the truly productive ones. It's easy to hold onto people because they are nice or you like them or they are a friend of someone important to you. Holding onto unproductive people will slow down your success in business just as much as it will hinder progress in your personal life. In a considerate, professional way, gently release the people who can't help you achieve your goals. You don't have to stop all contact with them; just don't include them in your core network.

**To be an effective networker, you should be operating
In each of these four cycles simultaneously.**

Third Cycle: Building Relationships

There are no short cuts to relationship building. Relationships grow over time with a hefty investment of planning and energy. During this cycle, you get to know each other. You learn each other's strengths and weaknesses, quirks, dreams and vulnerable areas. This knowledge helps you know how to relate to each other. Most important, during the relationship building cycle, you learn their values and how compatible they are with you. You learn to feel comfortable with them and you learn you can depend on each other.

We can make contacts quickly but we can't build meaningful relationships quickly. Only by spending time together, listening to each other, caring, and being available with our ideas, support and honesty can we develop meaningful, strong relationships.

Fourth Cycle: Building Trust

This can only happen after we have gone through the other cycles. There are people I trust with my life. I wouldn't hesitate to give a signed, blank check to others. When I need a favor, I can call a number of people and know the favor will be granted immediately with no questions asked. This is mutual; I would do the same for them. This is possible because we have invested in carefully building long-term relationships. I can trust these people because they have proven themselves many times.

When you reach the cycle of mutual trust, you have created the ultimate network. Enjoy it, nurture it and honor it!

You need to carefully evaluate each cycle of your networking on a regular basis so you can improve any weaknesses in the cycles and make appropriate changes. As in any precious relationship, never take your network for granted. Do things to keep your relationships alive and fresh. Express appreciation regularly. Tell other people how great these people are.

To be an effective networker, you should be operating in each of these four cycles simultaneously. In other words, you should always be searching for new contacts, continually reviewing those contacts to identify the truly productive ones, building relationships and creating an environment of trust. Be doing this, you will avoid suddenly finding yourself without new contacts and growing relationships.

Participate pro-actively in the cycles of networking to enjoy greater benefits and possibilities!

**For information concerning reprinting or using this article,
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