

Network Your Way to Success

Throughout life you will meet people in both business and social settings who may very well become meaningful contacts for you in the future. The more names you have in your contact file the more opportunities you have to accomplish most anything in business. Contacts can lead to growth in your career, a new career, a new job, more business associates, more friends, etc. Keep track of everyone. Always be ready to hand out your card and to ask for cards from others. Collect and date business cards. Record key information in your computer contacts list and always try to get an email address. You will learn simply by staying in touch.



Don't be shy! Get to know people. When you meet someone new, look him in the eye, stick your hand out with a firm handshake and say "Hello my name is ..." Have a short speech ready about who you are and what you do. Then be ready with a half dozen good questions to pursue the conversation. Plan your questions ahead to fit the circumstances. Be a personality—not a wallflower.

I have resourced new employees, checked references, built teams and ferreted out all kinds of problems with the aid of contacts both inside and outside the organization. Networking has been an essential component in building, revising and tearing up business strategies. The more you involve a broad array of associates in decisions the more data you receive which yields a better quality decision. The broader your network, the greater the potential.

Relationships with those at higher levels at different companies and in diverse businesses and can yield tremendous benefit. It is easy to "keep your head down" and stay focused on your regular responsibilities, but your leadership effectiveness and your overall knowledge base will grow with your ability to research and resource via an extensive network of contacts from a variety of backgrounds.

From time to time I receive invitations to sit on executive panels, serve as "an executive in residence" at universities and make high level contacts for others. There are also requests to serve on boards of directors and to teach classes on leadership, ethics and retailing. These invitations are a direct result of a lifetime of business networking. Everyone seeking to excel in business needs to be constantly building the contact list. I suggest setting a goal of adding a specific number of new active contacts every year.

Stay in touch with everyone. Go to school reunions, stay close to key people at your prior company and keep an open line with those who have left your organization. Meet people in your neighborhood and your community. Go to industry meetings and trade shows. Join your professional association and get to know your peers and competitors. There can be real advantages being close to your competitor.

For instance, there are nearly 500 names in my contact list and I have had some communication with 75% of them in the last year. It may be a call, a card, or an email – the point is "I stay in touch." Make the time. You never know when a contact will work to your benefit.

Every ambitious businessperson should have a plan and a commitment to be effectively networked. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. Networking is a win-win proposition. Make networking part of your life long mission.

*Joe Scarlett
Retired Chairman of Tractor Supply Company
Founder of the Scarlett Leadership Institute
July 2008*