

# The Power of Networking

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According to Merriam Webster, networking is defined as *“the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions.”* It’s this first part that I want to focus on: the exchange of information. Most of us become so involved in our daily grind that we may not have time to network. In fact, we may have our calls screened or sent directly to voicemail to avoid talking to just about anyone. We just do not have time. But what are we giving up when we do this? According to our definition, “information.” We all learned early on that information was power and with information, better decisions can be made.

If you are like most busy executives, the last thing you can afford is to be on the phone chit-chatting for hours each week talking with vendors, old friends and former business associates. What I find amazing is that these same very busy executives might someday find themselves on the outside looking in. People in transition realize very early on that they need to talk to vendors, old friends and former business associates to help them in their job search. Unfortunately, after years of neglect, your networking list might just be a tad bit out-of-date or maybe even “empty.”

Networking is not a one-way deal. It’s an exchange of information, meaning that it takes two to communicate and share information. You may not think you need to spend the time to network now, but if you don’t, someone on the other end may not need to network when you do.

Talking to vendors and service providers, for example, is not just about listening to their sales pitches. It’s also about learning what’s going on with new technologies, new products, new ideas, etc. It might just be that silver bullet you’ve been looking for to solve some problem you’re faced with. Or, it might give you a different perspective on the way your company is currently doing something. Maybe they don’t have the solution you are looking for, but they can refer you to someone who does. By taking this call, you might just learn something. Remember, it’s a chance to gain information. Nobody said you have to buy anything.

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What I realized early in my career was that vendors, for example, are out in the marketplace. They are in and out of different companies everyday. They may actually know where the openings are and who to talk to about getting an interview. Now, imagine that you've blown off someone's phone calls for years and then you want to plug in again because you need something, like information on job opportunities. Do you think you are really going to feel very comfortable calling someone out of the blue that you had neglected for years and then ask them for a favor? Do you think they'll really want to help?

Networking is as easy as taking a couple of minutes each day to talk to a select few vendors that call on you. Tell them your time is limited, but you wanted to hear what was going in their world. Maybe you'll have time for a brief meeting with them, or maybe you'll invite them to call back down the road when you might have more time. At a minimum, don't just blow them off. You also might want to go through your list of contacts in your phone directory and see who you've not talked to in a while and give them a call. Tell them you just wanted to stay in touch and see how they were doing. Again, we are not talking about long phone calls; we're talking about 3-4 minutes to say hello. Remember, they are busy too. A couple of calls a week is all it takes to stay connected. Let's see, if we make 2 calls a week for 52 weeks, that's over a hundred contacts that are now part of your networking stable. Pretty impressive!

Another way to stay connected is to attend association meetings, seminars, luncheons, etc. You might learn something, meet some new people to network with, and maybe even be more productive when you get back to the office. We all need to walk away from the in-box once in a while.

So, the next time your phone rings, pick it up and take a moment to hear what's going on in someone else's world. No, you don't have to pick up every call every time, but think about the fact that someday you may need something and will be praying that the person you are calling picks up the phone.