Don’t Show Off, Show Interest



How to network, not do in-person cold calls.

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Sometimes, when I go to networking events, I observe people engaging in what I like to call “dueling monologues.” Now, “Dueling Banjos” — that’s a great song. Dueling pianos, those are great music venues. Dueling monologues (prolonged dueling talks by one person at a time) — well, not so exciting.

Frankly, I don’t think most people (if any) are really interested if you ask them. The problem is that there are a lot of people winging it when it comes to networking. They attend an event and go straight into “sales mode.” They do this with someone who is also winging it which leads to the dueling monologue syndrome. This whole scenario would be pretty funny — **if it weren’t actually true**!!!

Unfortunately, it is true. So, the question is “How do we avoid the ‘Dueling Monologue’ Syndrome?” The answer is this:

Don’t show off, show interest.

What is the goal for your networking? If it is to build your business, then it’s all about building a relationship with people. Keep your eye on the ball. Don’t try to dazzle them with your brilliance (you can do that later). Stand out from the crowd and impress them with your genuine interest (for the record – your interest in them – not your interest in selling to them).

I understand that this feels counter-intuitive. It is a bit of a paradox, but the truth is that the best way to start building a relationship is to show interest.

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A good networker is like a good talk show host. A good host asks the guest questions and gives them time to elaborate and talk. A good networker is similar. Ask questions and let people talk. Then follow the thread of the conversation to a point where you can ask more questions. Here are some examples of questions to start with. Don’t do one question after another – do one or two of these questions and follow the thread of the conversation to ask more. Your questions should be open-ended, probing questions. These are questions that allow the respondent to open up and discuss what you’ve asked. Here are some examples:

- What do you like best about what you do? (If they give a short answer, ask them why or ask them to give some examples.)
- What got you started in your industry? (As they talk about this throw in additional clarification questions.)
- What’s your target market? (Drill down on this. Ask more questions to be clear about who their best clients are.)
- Give me an example of a great client for you. (Again,

drill down. See if you can get them to be specific.)

- What are some of the challenges you have in your business? (This gives you a great chance to find a way to help them, without selling to them, please!)
- Where else do you network? (This is great information to know where else they go – which gives you a chance to see them again. Ask them what they like about those networks.)

Remember that this should be more like an interview, not an interrogation. Make it conversational and follow the thread of the discussion you find interesting – or better yet, what they find interesting.

During that process, if you hear them describe a need or a problem of some kind, and you have someone in your personal network whom you trust, make sure to let them know that you'd be happy to refer someone you know and respect who they could talk to about it. Nothing expedites a relationship faster than helping someone you've met by referring another person (or even a book or website) to help them with a challenge.

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Don't be like most of the people out there who think they know how to network, but who are really just doing face-to-face cold-calling. Be different. *Don't show off, show interest.* The next time you are a witness to the dueling monologue syndrome, I want you to start humming to yourself the theme song from the movie *Deliverance*, (for you youngsters out there – that's "Dueling Banjos") because if you ever needed to be liberated from a conversation – it would be right then.

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