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Ways to maximize your networking

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Have you noticed that you are receiving many more invitations to networking events than you ever did before?

It's no accident. With the job market in upheaval and so many people starting their own businesses these days, more people are pursuing more networking opportunities than ever before. The problem is, many people don't know the first thing about working a networking event successfully.

Instead of going into a networking event with the mindset that you are going to "sell" to people, try a different approach.

Ask people what the most critical challenges are that they face. Ask them how the depressed economy has hurt their prospects, their job search, their business.

Find out from them what are the greatest challenges they face in growing a business, generating leads, introducing new products to market, advertising/promotions, retaining staff, expanding their business into new markets, etc.

Your approach when it comes to networking is to be as interesting and interested in others as possible.

Research who will be in attendance before you go to a networking event.

Most people have bios written about themselves on a social media site such as LinkedIn or Facebook, or they have a bio on their company Web site, or that of a panel discussion they participated in or a professional association they belong to.

One way to ensure successful networking efforts is to develop a networking plan.

If you are targeting several in-

dustries in which to pursue employment, or sell your products and services to, then find out all of the relevant industry events that these professionals attend.

Develop a formal plan to identify who you plan on targeting at these shows.

Research the companies that will be in attendance, and develop a strategy for getting in front of the right employees in those companies.

Maintain a networking event contact list that identifies the name and date of the show, who you met and whether they exhibited, presented a lecture or served on a panel discussion.

Keep notes that you took from their presentation, and summarize any discussions you had, plus indicate what the follow-up actions were that came out of your contact with the individuals you targeted at these events.

The more you learn about others beforehand and then during an event, the more likely you will be to make a great first impression.

Always approach a networking event as an opportunity to build relationships and add value to others.

If you take the approach of forcing yourself on someone, the desperation in your approach will come through loud and clear.

People will go out of their way to avoid you or choose not to pursue a relationship with you.

On the other hand, someone who can help people resolve issues by generating revenue, reducing costs, improving processes or just plain old solving problems will be extremely successful.

Ethan Chazin is the founder of The Chazin Group, which delivers career transition consulting services to job

seekers from all backgrounds and experience levels and assists recruiters, job placement firms and government-funded adult education centers to develop programs on behalf of their job-seeking candidates. He may be reached at (917) 239-5571 or ethan@thechazingroup.com.