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# MDRT Minute

## Building Connections Through Effective Networking

Networking is not just meeting and greeting. It's building long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationships for information exchange. Networking involves finding commonalities, building trust and keeping in touch — all the things that it takes to build and maintain every relationship.

**Connect before content.** Before you pass out a business card, you have to find a point of mutuality. The first order of business is to build, or start to build, a relationship. Why should I care about your card when I have no idea who you are?

**Request and offer help.** Before you enter a networking situation, think of something specific you need. It might be a name, a resource or a solution. When you express a need, be specific. Paint a clear picture for your contacts so they can really help you. For instance, you might say, "I'm looking for software that will track my contacts and networking activities. Do you know of a program like that?" People like to be helpful if you make it easy for them by being specific about your needs.

There are many ways to help people you meet. Do you know a great auto mechanic or how to make a garden flourish? Listen carefully for ways you might be of service. Then, offer your help or resource.

**Play the host.** Wherever you are, act as if it's your party. Introduce people to each other, find something they have in common and put them at ease. When you go into a room of strangers with a role, you're more at ease and, thus, able to meet and connect with people. If you're seated at a table where you don't know anyone, suggest each person introduce himself to the group.

**Be visible.** Be active in every group you're a part of. Speak in public. Write articles. Introduce a speaker. Post a blog. Hang out where your clients are. Ask a question or make a comment in a session. Give your name, company and location when you speak at any event.

**Keep in touch.** Once you've made a connection, here are a few ways to follow up and keep in touch that will keep you at the front of the client's mind:

- Write a note. Or, send postcards to contacts while you're at a conference; let them know you're learning things that will help them.
- Send cookies. They should be home-baked. Include the recipe.
- Invite your contact to attend a breakfast, meeting or seminar with you.
- Send an article of interest to show that you paid attention to his or her interests.
- Send a tip sheet that would be helpful to them in evaluating life insurance.
- Write five notes a day. Be specific in your thanks or in the connection you already have.

Networking is about looking at each person you meet as someone with potential, someone you should respect and someone you should try to build trust with. Why? As my mother said, "You just never know."

**Karen Susman** is an expert on networking, communication skills and wellness. She is the author of four guidebooks on networking, time management, humor and building community involvement. Susman's entire 2010 Annual Meeting presentation is available at [www.mdrtpowercenter.org](http://www.mdrtpowercenter.org).