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Business Networking

Webster defines networking as, “the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups or institutions.” Based upon the response to the 2005 Green Bay Society for Human Resource Management survey, 87.2% of the members joined for the opportunity to do just that. Obviously, there is no shortage of professionals looking for an avenue to exchange information and/or services with others in the business community. But how you use that network opportunity can greatly affect both your personal success and that of your organization.

To add to Webster’s standard definition, there are a myriad of other reasons that individuals seek networking opportunities. In addition to the sharing and exchange of information and ideas, many professionals use networking to:

- Uncover potential business opportunities
- Seek employment
- Recruit candidates
- Gauge reaction for new ideas or products
- Build relationships
- Remain abreast of industry trends

An interesting aspect of networking is that you may not realize you’re actually doing it. An act as simple as running into a business contact and discussing his/her workday is networking. You may inadvertently uncover a new idea or opportunity during the course of a typical conversation. This is the beauty of networking – it can be found almost anywhere at anytime.

Aside from everyday, informal networking, there are various formal organizations and meetings that bring professionals together for just this reason. Contact your local Chamber of Commerce for upcoming meetings and for the potential to sponsor an event in your organization’s name. As with the Society for Human Resource Management, most professions will encourage membership in local or regional associations, opening the door for communication with others from similar fields. Setting up personal networking sessions is as easy as picking up the phone and touching base with colleagues, friends and others that may be able to assist, whether presently or in the future.

Once you find yourself in a networking situation, make the most of it! Meet people, learn about others’ business, the problems they face, the solutions they have developed and the trends they see. Listen for opportunities for your company and for yourself. Also, be sure to share some of your own information and ideas. Successful, long-term networking is a two way street where everyone involved reaps the benefits.

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