

A Simple Lesson to Successful Networking: Get in the *Flow*!

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You've most undoubtedly heard the saying 'Knowledge is Power'. Most likely you've acknowledged the fact that this old adage is quite accurate and basically common sense. The more knowledge we possessed as a student in high school on a particular topic, the better we were at writing our exams. The interesting concept of exams is that if you don't know what is going to be on the test you're basically going to have to review the entire content in order to be successful. Think back to a time when you were required to study. How did you do on the exam when the teacher gave you a solid outline of what was to be included on the test? How did you do when the teacher provided little information? If the teacher provided little information on what was going to be on the exam, you most likely studied content that was not on the test. The key was to determine which areas would be covered and then to focus your studying of those areas in detail and only browse through the rest of the material. This holds true for gathering information. Which information is useful and what can you use for another day? This is a question that needs to be answered if you are to be successful at networking. When you become part of the flow of information, you allow yourself to gather and maintain bits of information that may have immediate or long term impact on your objectives. Getting in the flow does not necessarily lead you to a solution but provides you with the content necessary to identify some of the areas required to become successful.

Let's take as an example that you are trying to sell one of your products. The product you're trying to sell is a widget. Your widget is not new to the market but has some features that are quite unique. You've been selling your widget for about a year and have a general idea of the sales cycle, which is around eight weeks. The eight-week sales cycle starts from when you first introduce the widget to a new prospect until they actually purchase it. Your widget sales cycle now works as a framework or timeline that helps you gauge your movement through the sales process. If you're not moving from step-to-step within that cycle, you know that the likelihood of making the sale drastically decreases. Throughout this period your goal is to gather as much information as you can about the prospect in order to increase the chances of closing the sale. How can this product benefit the prospect? What is the prospect doing now without your widget? When will the prospect decide to buy your widget? These are just some of the questions that need to be answered to determine the likelihood of closing the deal. Essentially, the sales cycle has become a date-driven process which involves the collection of information that will assist you in making a sale. Is there more than one person involved in making the decision to purchase your widget? When do they plan on buying your widget or a similar product? Is the prospect aware of the widget's price? These questions may take one day or a number of days to answer. Whatever the length of time, if you're not in the flow of information, the likelihood of closing the sale is drastically reduced.

The above situation is just one example of the importance of being in the flow. If you're not gathering information in whatever you do, you're not growing as a person. Whether it's for business, career or to learn a hobby, the influx of information adds to our knowledge base, allowing us to make decisions that lead to solutions. If you're not in the flow, the chances of getting useful pieces of information that can complete the picture will be highly unlikely. As in the sales situation above, the more information you gather, the better the position you are in to determine whether you have a chance at being successful. By being in the flow, you have a chance of gathering information that will assist you in reaching your full potential. If you're not in the flow, many of the opportunities you identify will remain only opportunities. Converting these opportunities to solutions is something that does not happen overnight and requires the ability to see things through. Getting in the flow will allow you to maximize the number of contacts who can provide information to help you reach a solution.

Here's the 5 top strategies for getting in the flow:

1. Acknowledging that information is always available, we just need to find it.
2. Research your network and what information exists within it.
3. Remember, to get information you have and be willing to share it.
4. Create a knowledge repository.
5. Don't be afraid to ask for information.