

## What Have You Done for Others Lately?

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What have you done for others lately? What does that question have to do with networking? EVERYTHING!

The biggest secret the best networkers share is that it is not about what you can get from your contacts that matters, it is what you can do for them. How can you help them? Can you volunteer at their organization or special event? Can you contribute to their newsletter or website by writing an article? Can you speak at a lunch and learn for free? These are all supplementary ways to network. Let's look at the opportunities they present.

Volunteering can take place in many ways, shapes and forms. You can volunteer at the board of trade, not for profit agencies and charities, sports teams, your children's or grandchildren's schools ...the list is endless. The opportunities presented are just as varied. Be selective when you volunteer though and plan it like you plan your other forms of networking.

The first rule of volunteering is to select organizations you believe in, you have a passion for. If you don't, it will show in your attitude and it will become a chore for you to do. You should also select an opportunity where you can showcase your skills. For example, as part of the Stoney Creek Chamber of Commerce I volunteered to get involved with a Hamilton community team whose mandate was workforce development. This offered me the opportunity to work in an area I love (human resources) while demonstrating my skills as a facilitator. I ended up chairing the committee and developing many relationships over the three year period we were together. One of those relationships developed into a client/supplier relationship which is still ongoing to this day. Who says volunteering doesn't pay?

Becoming a resource for others is another great way to network. What is your area of expertise? Write about it and submit your article to magazines, your local paper and other people's newsletters and websites. You will soon be recognized as an expert as all these avenues allow you to get your name and brand out there. And don't stop once the article appears! Make copies of it and send to your existing and potential clients, post it on your website and send a note to your distribution list telling others it is there, showcase it on LinkedIn. Maximize the opportunity presented with one simple article.

Once you are considered an expert, offer to speak at different events. Again, your Board of Trade is an excellent place to do this. Not only will you build a relationship with the people who work there (and have connections!) you will meet the people in your audience. By speaking, you have introduced yourself to a large number of people at one time. Offer a gift for a draw and you will be able to collect business cards and follow up with each participant to thank them for coming to hear you speak.

All of these activities take time and need to be integrated within your networking plan. How many “regular” networking events do you attend a month? How many organizations can you volunteer for? How many articles can you write and how many events can you speak at? Plan it. Then go after it. It is worth the effort.

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