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### **Five Words on Which to Build Your Business**

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Matt brought up the point that networking effectiveness is becoming a challenge as of late. He participates in a number of the networking groups around the state, and the attendees are all the same people. As Matt stated, he needs new blood.

Matt's comments ignited a firestorm discussion on the value of networking. To a person, everyone around the table said that the #1 source for new business was referrals from your network. Logically, building that network should build business. The question – How to build a network effectively?

Our consensus answer is based on five words – **How can I help you?** That's it. If you approach every relationship with that frame of mind, you will build a very effective network.

Networking has gotten a bad name. People treat it as an activity. Go to an event, meet people, describe who you are, ask what they do, and exchange business cards. Possibly meet outside the meeting. All the while, you're asking them for introductions, and they're asking you for introductions. Mentally on some level you're keeping score.

They now even do "speed networking", much like speed dating. One or two minute introductions, and move on down the line. As described, networking is a verb. It is an active practice of meeting people for the express purpose of building business through introductions.

Now think about the best networked people you know. Think about those individuals who have a wide web of relationships. They do not network in this manner. They don't ask for help. They offer it. **Real networking is about finding ways to make other people more successful.**

Based on this recast definition, the group came up with some guidelines to building an effective network. First and foremost, **be authentic**. The quick hit

networking fiend comes off as transparent. They're out for themselves, and that becomes quickly apparent. The true network maven realizes that networks are relationships, and in relationships you need to be authentic. False front facades lead to short term relationships.

Second, **follow through**. Don't offer help to someone unless you really mean it. Your actions will always speak louder than your words. Plus, following up on your actions is another opportunity to further the relationship.

Third, **don't keep score**. It doesn't matter. What matters is the building of relationships. Relationships founded on a genuine desire to help someone. If you approach your relationships with an authentic desire to help, you will receive help in return. It's human nature. People like to help each other, and they feel good when they can do that.

Next, **be active**. Identify people you would like to get to know. Attend events where the opportunity to meet them might present itself. Attend other business events where you can mix with people you usually might not meet. The wider you can spread your access, the greater the opportunity to build your network.

Finally, **be respectful of your relationships**. In today's hectic climate, time is the most precious commodity. If you offer someone help, or are willing to make a connection for them, be respectful of the person you are connecting. If appropriate, check first to be sure the person you're connecting has the time to help.

Networks are relationships, not resources. Relationships have longevity, and are founded on genuine connections between people. Resources are commodities you tap into. Stop networking (as a verb). Ask the five simple words that can open opportunities for strong long lasting relationships – How can I help you? Begin building a web of relationships and an effective network. This will help you build your business.

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