

ESSENTIAL TOOLS NEEDED TO GET RESULTS AND THRIVE FROM YOUR NETWORKING

MODULE TWO

Module Two – Why Networking?

Contents

Attitude	2
Align Yourself to Networking	2
Waste of Money	4
Money, money, money	5
Making Time	6
Expecting Immediate Results.....	7
Never Judge Others.....	8
Specific Outcomes for Meetings.....	8
Summary	10

Attitude

The other part of your preparation for your strategy is creating the right attitude!!

Here are some of the biggest mistakes many VAs make when it comes to their attitude towards networking:

- They see networking as a waste of time and a waste of money;
- They don't plan ahead in advance, fail to let their clients know of their time commitment to a regular networking membership, and instead, allow client demands to override their attendance at networking meetings;
- They expect to get business early on from the networking meetings and then stop going when this doesn't happen;
- They believe that the members of the group should be using their VA services, or judge the type of people there by thinking if the members don't seem like prospective clients then the VA might as well resist joining the group.

Does any of this sound familiar? If it does, don't worry, these are very easy misunderstandings to make when anyone starts out in business. If nobody provides you with the insight you need to understand networking, then of course it's easy to have the wrong attitude.

Someone once said to me that people only attend networking meetings when they're in need of more business and not doing so well. That is so wrong. Good networkers see networking as good business sense.

Align Yourself to Networking

OK, let's look at the mistakes mentioned above and how to avoid them. When you were employed you probably didn't have to network for your company. Now that you are self-employed you do have to network as it is an important part of your marketing strategy. Miss it out and you're potentially missing out on thousands of pounds of business... yes, as much as that!

Firstly, it's not a waste of time or money, but networking does require time and commitment. You cannot expect for one moment that you can turn up at a meeting and expect someone to give you a referral or to work with you themselves. You must give it time.

The time you must invest in attending the same networking group will enable you to nurture relationships with your fellow members. (There's more on this later, by the way.) How can you expect anyone to do business with you in any shape or form if they don't know you that well? Yes, you may seem a very friendly and professional person from first impressions, but that's all.

People need to know what you're about. They need to know about you as a person. They want to know what makes you the go-to VA, why you are the VA to use as opposed to another VA. They want to know what your clients get from working with you, what the tangible benefits are. They want to understand how you work and what you offer.

Indeed, they want to know what support you're looking for, what type of contacts would be useful for you, what education you may require etc. And, of course, networking is not all about you, is it?!

In order to build trust in people's eyes, as well as get to know you and like you, you **MUST GIVE IT TIME!!** I really cannot stress this enough.

If you don't give it time, you're not in a strong enough situation to get to know your fellow networkers at a deeper level. You're not going to understand their business at a deeper level. As a result, you're not going to be able to pass quality referrals, support them or connect them to their ideal contacts.

The attitude must be that you attend on a consistent basis and you get to know others first. Let them talk about themselves, ask questions, and listen to their responses so that you can find out as much as you can. That way you can support them with the right referrals, connections or support.

Therefore, as part of your preparation, be armed with some great questions.

Here are some to start you off:

- What is the nature of your business?
- Do you work on your own or do you have a team?
- What inspired you to get involved in this business?
- What do you love about what you do?
- What type of clients do you tend to work with most?
- What do your clients say are the reason they come to you as opposed to others in your industry?
- How long do you tend to work with your clients for?
- What are the results you have helped your clients to achieve?
- What are your fees?
- I'd love to be able to support you, what would be most helpful to you?

- Are you looking for more business? If so, what would be the most ideal referrals I could pass on to you?
- Do you work with any strategic partners? Are you looking for any specifically?
- What do you find are the most common challenges in your business?

Of course, none of these questions are meant to lead to a sales pitch as that would be very sneaky. The whole point of asking good questions is so that you can really and truly understand people in your business community.

Action:

Start writing down more good questions that you know will help you to further understand and support your fellow networking members.

Waste of Money

Let's look a little further at the attitude that networking is a waste of time and money.

By attending your meetings on a regular and consistent basis, there could be that one visitor who is looking to see how this networking group supports one another. If they see that some of the members don't bother to even turn up, then that sends out a negative message. That visitor doesn't bother to join and so each member has lost out on some possible opportunities!

By attending each of your meetings and getting to know your members, as they are getting to know you, you are seen as a proactive and professional business owner. The impression you start to create is of someone who is a serious business owner and not someone that just plays at being a business owner.

Therefore, their trust in you starts to build. This is the best card to have in your deck; the card of trust. If others trust you, you are more likely to get referrals, connections and opportunities, and by investing time to attend and nurture those relationships, you will earn that trust even further.

This is not going to be all about you. Networking is about building your business community and it's about having the spirit of generosity.

As the saying goes "Givers Gain". You have to be able to have the attitude that you are there to support other people.

Money, money, money

Now I'm going to sound blunt here, but you'd rather me be honest with you, wouldn't you?

When people start out in business, they will not yet have earned any money from their business. Therefore, unless they have some savings or redundancy pay, they'll have the attitude that until they earn some money from their business, they won't be able to invest in any networking membership or training or coaching etc.

Ask any successful business owner, mentor or coach, and they will tell you that actually, if you don't have any other funds, you have to use your personal money to get you started.

By investing in your networking membership, training and/or coaching, you will meet people who will teach you the faster track to business success; they will give you advice. Or you will learn from people in the same industry as you have entered, who have made ALL the mistakes AND have been successful, those from whom you can learn.

All these people you are learning from are saving you money!!

I have to make this point. It has been stated by people like James Caan and other millionaire mentors, that you will achieve financial and business success far quicker when you learn from the mistakes and wins of others before you. Otherwise, it's rather like being a child and an adult gives you advice and you ignore it, then you make the mistakes they told you not to make and you regret it!

Now you could be of the attitude that making your own mistakes is the better way of learning, well so be it, but what if those mistakes cost you a lot of money or they mean you take far longer than is absolutely necessary to achieve what you wanted to. There is no logic in wasting time and money when you can follow the model of someone else and actually end up making more money!

When you are asked to invest £250 or more in your networking membership, to give up three or more hours of your valuable time to attend, to cover the cost of your travel there and back and pay for your meeting fee, never think that's expensive. Instead, adopt the attitude that you know that by investing time and money in this important marketing tool, you will earn that investment back many times over.

PLUS, remember: all you pay for is a taxable expense!!

To build and grow your VA business, you need to be charging a "decent" hourly rate – perhaps you want to expand your team with Associates so that you are "the Boss" of your business or offer a specialist skill that commands a higher rate – whichever method you go down, an investment in your networking is critical to building the businesses connections.

Action:

If you are not charging over £25 per hour for ad-hoc services, start a plan to change your fees ASAP. It is imperative you charge your worth.

Making Time

While working for yourself, time is of the essence, however, if you make the time to go to at least two networking meetings a month then it would help your business grow and give you some encouraging support as well as valued information for your business.

Action:

Attend your next two networking meetings and avoid talking about you. Use these as a way of getting to know the people in your group and investigate how you can support them.

Put the time in your diary and say NO to anything that will stop you from going to a networking event, be committed to yourself and respect your business. The greater the frequency of your networking, the easier it gets for you to present your business (ie talk about your business) to others, it will also increase your confidence at the same time as putting your business on the map as the go to VA business in your area.

As part of your client management, you should be supporting your clients by forward planning. This requires you to inform your clients that you will be unavailable on those times you are attending your networking meetings (if you like to let them know why, that's up to you). Your clients should respect that you are a business and, as part of your business growth, you will be networking; any client who values their business should understand this.

As you grow your business you could also be taking on associate VAs to support you when you are not in a position to focus on your clients. Therefore, for clients who are demanding, you can still support them by having your associate provide the services on the day you are networking. Otherwise, all it takes is your client to call you in need of support on that day, you skip your networking event and you miss one brilliant opportunity because you weren't able to attend the meeting.

Clients will value you if you are forward planning, remaining proactive and have back-up support.

Associates VAs are there as your contingency planning or risk assessments; miss associates out of your operational strategy and your business will start to break at the seams.

If you allow your client work to override your attendance at networking meetings because you state you need the money, then you are actually losing money. How? Because you have missed an invaluable business opportunity by not attending the meeting, either by not committing to building and nurturing your business relationships, and missing out on creating trust in the eyes of others. Plus, someone who attended that meeting may have had an opportunity for you in some shape or form.

By attending your meetings on a regular and consistent basis, there could be that one visitor looking to see how this networking group supports one another. If they see that some of the members don't bother to even turn up, then that sends out a negative message. That visitor doesn't bother to join and then each member has lost out on some possible opportunities!

Action:

1. Look at changing your planning strategy and client management so that you can start to implement your networking meetings.
2. Start informing your clients of the days each month you are out of the office and send them reminders a week in advance and three days in advance. Put it in their diary if you feel that's the best option.
3. If you haven't done so, consider and start to investigate and interview prospective associate VAs to support your clients when you are at your networking meetings.

Expecting Immediate Results

If you expect that you should be getting business very early on from your networking then you are going to be disappointed. You must never expect immediate results otherwise you will find yourself selling to people. Let me ask you: Do you like being sold to? No. Do you recommend people for business you don't know? No. Then you mustn't expect other people to.

As I said earlier, you must give this time and allow others to instil trust in you. This doesn't happen overnight. However, if you are taking the time to invest in your networking, as I have been showing you so far, then you may find that the results happen sooner as people see you as a giver not a taker. But, if you are desperate for income to come in immediately, then you'll find that you'll affect your attraction and put people off. This will affect the timing in which you gain results.

In the next part, we'll talk about being clear on the outcomes you want and this will help you to attract results and get support from your networking community. When you are clear on the outcomes you want to achieve in your business and have a timeline you are working towards, you'll feel much more in control.

Never Judge Others

I mentioned that one of the mistakes VAs make is that they look around the room to see who is a member of the group and judge whether any of these people are likely to use their VA services. Sometimes they will attract clients from within the group and then, when most people have become a client, they will leave the group.

Not only is this very short-sighted, but it is not how networking works.

You just cannot judge the people in the room. At one networking meeting I attended, one member was looking for a specific introduction a particular firm of accountants. It just so happened that one of the members was married to the director of that very company!

Remember, you never know who they might know. They could be working with a client who falls into your niche market, so never make an assumption. I think this is one of the biggest downfalls that a lot of people make when they are networking; they make assumptions and you simply cannot afford to do so.

People have lives outside of the networking meeting, they may be married or have partners, they'll live somewhere with neighbours, they may be a member of a local choir, they may belong to the local golf club, they'll attend other networking groups or conferences, they'll have clients etc, etc.

So, by not joining a group because you have looked at who's a member and thought to yourself that it's unlikely they'll connect you to anyone, then you've just lost out on more opportunities than you could imagine and you are viewed as being very short-sighted.

It's not about making the group members your clients. Of course, if any of them do become your clients then that's a bonus. However, this is about making connections through the group, by *not* selling to them. Again, as mentioned earlier, by getting to know the group and nurturing those relationships, people will get to know you, like you, trust you, understand your business, and introductions will come through the members.

Specific Outcomes for Meetings

Part of your preparation goes back to that original point made in module one: what do you want?

Before every networking meeting you attend, be clear about what you want to achieve.

What is the outcome? You have to set yourself goals for each meeting. There is no point going along because you know you are a member, and even the meetings where you are a long term member, you still have to turn up. Without an outcome in mind, you will come away feeling disappointed that you haven't achieved anything specific. If you know what you want to achieve for each meeting then you are more

likely to be able to direct yourself to particular people in the group and ask for their help or ask for connections.

If other people in your networking meeting don't know what support you want or how they can help you, then they are not going to be able to. Not because they don't want to, but rather because you haven't provided a clear message.

Where you have an opportunity to ask for help – it could be part of your one or 10-minute presentation or when you are having a conversation - be clear about what you are asking for.

A lot of people feel uncomfortable about asking for help. They feel, as I used to, that they are using people and don't want to come across as being selfish or not serious business owner. Well you are not being selfish and actually it takes an element of strength to ask for help. It's absolutely OK! That is what you are there for simply because you are also going to be asking other people "how can I help or support you?"

Action:

1. Think about the outcome you want by the end of your next meeting.
2. Make sure your strategy is clear about the outcome you want to achieve after every single meeting over the next 90 days.
3. Note down the support or help you want and ask people for it so that they can go away from that meeting and know how they are going to support you.

Summary

- Networking must be approached with the right attitude before you even step foot into any meeting room.
- It is something that, with investment of your time and money, will bring you the opportunity to raise your profile as someone who is professional, a giver and a supporter. You will create the impression that you are there to support your fellow networkers, make connections and support them through their challenges.
- In addition, networking is about learning from others through their support and advice to help save you making some costly mistakes, and also by creating a dream team of people around you.
- Making time for networking is crucial as without you in attendance it creates a negative impression of you. People who only attend when they can are seen as takers; only going when they need the business or when they're not busy, therefore missing out on proactively supporting their fellow business community. People don't instil trust in someone who is only out to get what they can from networking. Givers gain!
- By giving your networking time, it means you get results, but only as long as you are clear on the outcomes you want from your networking, fellow networkers and each meeting.
- Never judge the type of industries represented in the group, or even the people there, as you never know who they know. A great connection can be made from someone you least expect.
- Complete the action points within this module and also start to look at ways in which you can change your attitude towards networking, if you need to that is.

Well done, this is the second of 10 modules... some more action to take.