

ESSENTIAL TOOLS NEEDED TO GET RESULTS AND THRIVE FROM YOUR NETWORKING

MODULE THREE

Module Three – Relationship Building

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Get to Know Your Members: Mistakes VAs Make

An essential ingredient of your networking strategy is developing relationships with your fellow members as well as your networking community as a whole.

Here are some of the biggest mistakes many VAs make when it comes to this part of the networking strategy:

- They focus more on telling people what they can do for them without allowing people to get to know them first;
- They don't always see the point of developing relationships or investing time to nurture them as they're more keen to get a client as soon as possible;
- They don't invest time outside of the networking time to have one-to-one meetings;
- They don't make the effort to get to know each of the members of their networking group as they make assumptions on whether these people would be useful to them or potential clients or not;
- They fail at being consistent with their attendance of meetings so miss out on any support or business opportunities from fellow members;
- They're not always proactive in following up with people and only speak to them at each networking meeting;
- They don't give themselves the chance for other members to get to know them, like them, understand their business and trust them.

Does any of this sound familiar? If it does, please take notice of this section as it is one of the most important modules that will contribute to your return on investment.

The Importance of Relationship Building

I once remember having a conversation with someone at a networking meeting where I was a visitor. The man I was speaking with was complaining how networking just didn't seem to work. He told me that he'd been attending this group for three months (it was a once a month meeting) and nothing was happening for him. Being naturally curious, I asked what he had said to people as part of his introduction and how he had worked the room.

He responded by telling me that he would approach someone, tell them about his business and if they weren't interested in buying from him then he'd go and talk to someone else. He said it was necessary to meet as many people as possible. He was (and hopefully still is) a financial advisor. It doesn't require much common sense to realise that he was putting people off. If anything, he seemed desperate and nobody wants to do business with a desperate financial advisor. In fact, nobody

wants to do business with anyone whom is desperate and is trying the hard sell on you.

What he was doing is a classic mistake many people make; they focus on trying to speak to as many people in that room to hopefully get a sale. No effort is made in actually allowing people to get to know them first. Nobody will buy from anyone immediately unless, in some occasional situations, there is a desperate need and/or the brand of the company already has a well-known reputation.

If you're not there to build the relationships, someone will take your limelight!

What you have to bear in mind is that in the time between today and your next group meeting, your fellow networking members will be networking elsewhere, they'll be working with their clients, networking within their personal circles, taking part in online discussion groups or making connections on social media platforms. Within this time, they could be liaising with other business people who are just the right clients or connections you're looking for referrals to. However, if you've not invested any valuable time in nurturing those relationships with all the members of your group, you're missing out.

In fact, these members may also be members of other groups in which other VAs also attend. Let's assume the other VAs have been extremely proactive in building relationships and showing support to these members. These VAs will more than likely attract more business opportunities from the members as a result. They are doing what it takes to stand out, and with very good intentions.

As part of your strategy you need to get to know each of the members in that group really well. It doesn't matter if they don't fall into your niche market, it doesn't matter if they don't work with your niche market or your prospective clients, it doesn't even matter if they never want your services or even if they already have a VA. By getting to know them you're gaining a deeper understanding of what they do, so that you can support them and vice versa. When you show your support, it builds an element of trust in their minds about you, as well as creating a great impression.

Why is it important to spend your valuable business time getting to know people that you may never get business from? Well, first of all, how do you know you'll never get business from them? Making assumptions in business is a bad idea. Secondly, yes, your business time is very valuable, which is why you are making connections with people in your circles, both personal and business.

If you know anyone who invests their hard earned cash into shares, they are doing so because they know at some point in the future they will earn a return.

Our time is valuable. I meet people who are MDs of large organisations with a list of meetings to attend and tasks to do as long as their arm, however, they are still committed to their networking. Why? Because they know the importance of building relationships and keeping their profile high and positive in people's minds. And in

any case, it's not all about them; if they can make a connection for one of their fellow members or clients, then that is worth its weight in gold.

How often have you tried explaining to people what you do as a VA and not everyone gets it? I am covering this later on, but just for now, imagine you have the opportunity to have some quality time, perhaps over a long period of time, getting to know your fellow networking members. During this time, you manage to clearly educate them as to what you do and how it works, you also educate them and help them to understand clearly the benefits and results your clients achieve by having you support them. By getting to really know you, they get your passion for your business and why you do what you do.

When, and only when, your fellow members truly understand what you do and what makes you unique from other VAs, will you start to see referrals coming in your direction. How many times have you thought you could possibly make an introduction for someone but you weren't entirely sure what they did in business, or worse, you wrongly explained what they did and the introduction failed? Well this is what's happening in your circle; when people haven't got to know you and understand you, they'll either not make any introductions for you or mistakenly think that you're not for them.

Trust comes by making time to get to know people, educating them about your business and allowing them to get to know you as a person. Quite often from there comes the friendship. Yes, you can make friends in networking you know!

But a really important lesson to learn here is this:

If people see that you are investing time to get to know them, understand their business and know that you are keen to support them, they will build trust in you.

Would you make an introduction to your most valued clients with someone you didn't know well, whilst knowing that as soon as the introduction was made, your clients would be sold to? Of course not. So don't expect others to do the same.

In between today and your networking meeting, you get to meet other people, new clients; you chat online with your friends on Facebook, attend a conference and meet other people. Because you are now building quality relationships with your fellow networking members, and because you have made an effort and continued to get to know them and their businesses, you'll be able to spot a great opportunity for them when you see it. This is networking at a deeper level.

Avoid Passing Referrals to People You Don't Know

There is one more VERY valid reason why building relationships with your fellow members is important.

Don't pass referrals for people you don't know or services you have no experience of unless you caveat your recommendations with this.

By building relationships, nurturing them, understanding their business and why people choose to work with them, you can open up the opportunities for your fellow members and clients, and also attract additional opportunities for you as well. But it means that when you do pass on a referral, it will be a genuine one because you've got to know, like and trust the other person. In addition, you would have learned about the results they've helped their clients to achieve, heard the testimonials and even seen a portfolio perhaps.

It's your reputation on the line when you make the wrong assumption about someone. Get to know them first!

How to Get to Know Them

Remember, you never know who your members might know. They could be working with a client who falls into your niche market; they could be married to someone who would be a great introducer for you - so never make an assumption. I believe this is one of the biggest downfalls that a lot of people make when they are networking.

A great way to get to know fellow members is to arrange a one-to-one.

But how do you get to really know someone in your networking group and how much time should you be spending with them?

Action:

1. If your next meeting is within the coming week, look at your diary and aim to allocate some one-to-one time with at least a couple of members, either to take place before and/or after the meeting.
2. If there are people you have met previously, but not yet booked a one-to-one with then call. Yes, pick up the phone and avoid email please, and speak to these people to arrange a one-to-one with them. Ideally before your next networking meeting.
3. If there is someone in particular you would like to purposely develop a relationship with because you're investigating possible strategic alliances or associate arrangements, then ensure they're on your one-to-one list. Note down how you see a possible alliance with them.

4. When you call the members, tell them that you'd like to arrange a one-to-one so you can both gain a greater understanding of one another's business. In particular, you are very keen to further understand what they do and clarify what support and connections they are looking for.
5. Ask if they would like to meet you before or after the next meeting and allocate an hour. If they are not available then, get a slot booked into your respective diaries and arrange to meet at the next meeting or a one-to-one via Skype or phone.
6. At least two or three days before the day (dependent on when you arranged this one-to-one), send them a text or email just confirming the meeting and how much you are looking forward to it. This acts as a reminder and ensures that you are committed. Do the same with at least one more member.
7. When you are at that meeting, seek out another two members and arrange to have a one-to-one at the next meeting or by phone if need be. Do the same with the reminders and confirmations for the next month!

One-to-One (1:2:1) Meetings

How I wish someone had explained to me how a 1:2:1 meeting worked when I first started.

Preparing for your one-to-one is a good idea as it will give you an insight into the person. Start by looking at their website, then any testimonials, or LinkedIn to understand who they work with and their clients' experiences. Doing this homework reinforces the message that you are keen to support them and you are taking this seriously.

Browse their Facebook business page, follow them on Twitter or sign up for their newsletter and read their blog posts so you can understand what they are broadcasting.

Next, start preparing and writing down some good questions. I would want to go much deeper about how they work, the client experiences, as well as their fees. You want to show that you are really taking an interest in the other person, but in addition, the more you understand, the more likely you can support them and spot the right referrals and opportunities for them. In addition to this, you are very likely to meet someone else in their industry from another networking group, so it's important to understand what differentiates them from their competitors.

Here are some questions I always ask in my one-to-ones which always lead me to a greater understanding. I often write them down and just let people know that you've prepared some questions:

1. What's your specific area of expertise? (This is better than asking "What do you do?" This helps you to get clear what they are an expert in, their knowledge and how long they've been experienced at this. People like to have the chance to demonstrate their abilities and makes them feel good that you are taking an interest.)
2. What do you specialise in?
3. Typically, who are the types of people you attract as your clients? (This gives you an understanding of who you can connect them to.)
4. What do you believe distinguishes you from other people who offer a similar service/product? (This helps you to understand what makes them different and unique from others in their industry or competitors.)
5. Take me through, step-by-step, how you work with a client.
6. How do your clients benefit from working with you?
7. What has been the most rewarding experience in your business?
8. Do you work with any associates? (This helps you to identify other people who may be suitable candidates to work with them as associates but also the different services they can offer.)
9. Tell me about your fees in more detail and if you offer any retainer packages.
10. Tell me an important outcome you want to achieve in your business in the next three months.
11. If you were to think now about what support you are seeking for your business or to help you to achieve your outcomes, what is it you need?
12. What type of person or business are you looking for introductions to that would help you in your business?

By finding out as much about this person, and especially how they are different from others, you put yourself in a much stronger situation and position to be able to carry that message across to people that you recommend to them.

Don't just sit there and start at the top of the questions, working your way through them. You need a conversation to flow, remember it's about building relationships but having an idea about what you want to know is also important.

Now you need to do the same for them - answer your own questions for them although do discuss this first as I'm sure no doubt that they will have their own questions for you.

Remember this is not about focusing on the fact that you are a Virtual Assistant. That means nothing.

What you have to get across is why you do what you do, why are you passionate about what you do.

Be really clear about:

- how your clients benefit from working with you as an individual;
- what the positive impact is for your clients when they are focusing on those key activities because they have got the time to do so;
- the type of people you work with so that the other person knows who they can recommend to you.

Some VAs prepare a profile sheet which summarises the answers to the above questions. They would print it off with their logo and contact information and present it to the other person as well as email it to them as a PDF. The reason for this was quite simply so that we could both have a conversation without them feeling they had to take notes. We all know that something vital is missed when we write notes. We stop listening. To help you avoid note taking, just write down key words that represent the answer. I would not give this to them unless they ask for something to take away.

Action:

Write a description of you, of who you are, what makes you unique and original? What do people love about you? What are you enthusiastic or passionate about? What qualities do you have that make you unique? What is your personal style? If your best friend were to describe you, what would they say?

Create a short and long version of this so that you can get comfortable explaining it in different networking forums.

Know What Help You Need

If you don't know what support you're looking for, how can you expect others to support you? Are you embarrassed about asking for help? If you have come from the PA background, you'll probably be very used to being the one who supports everyone else and leave your needs until last. Well this is your time now to get

support. This is one of the great features of having a network and being part of a real business community.

Be really clear about what help or support or outcomes you are looking to achieve. Remember you will know all of this because you have made it part of your strategy. We covered outcomes at the beginning of this e-course so you may want to revisit that.

Action:

To help you, I have placed a Goals Table below and you can use this as a general guideline of monthly targets and outcomes. This way you know what training you are looking for, advice you need to seek, people you want introductions to, other networking meetings you wish to be invited to etc.

Change the sections as per your own unique requirements and goals, this is just a guideline.

| SECTION | SHORT TERM Within 1 Month What do I want? | MID TERM Within the Next 90 Days What do I want? |
|--|--|---|
| Education/Training | | |
| Financial | | |
| Contacts | | |
| Mentoring/Advice | | |
| Clients | | |
| Associates | | |
| Passive Income Opportunities and Joint Venture Partners | | |

The reason for this table is purely so that you can start to focus on what support you need. Once you have clarified what you want to achieve short-term in the next month and mid-term in the next 90 days, you can then identify the gaps that need to be filled and then you know what help you can ask.

These goals need to be aligned with your 12-months goal.

Networking isn't about asking for referrals, yes that comes, but it's realising that within your group you have some great people who have been in business for many years. These people have probably made some big mistakes and the great thing here is that you can learn from them. People love it when you ask for their advice.

Ensure you're prepared next time someone asks how they can support you.

Be Consistent with Your Relationship Building

As part of getting to know your fellow networking members, you have to ensure that you are being consistent. When you have had a one-to-one with someone, arrange for another one with them at a later date, perhaps arrange for this to take place once every six to twelve months. Think about your last six months, I bet lots has changed for you within that time; the same will be for them also! You will have experienced changes and developments and so will they. This means you should consistently keep yourself and them updated; this will support the referral system going but also you'll develop some great friendships.

It's like any relationship, the more you are attentive towards it, the more it will nurture, develop and strengthen. Networking is about creating relationships and is often described as creating links with people and the links of that chain must grow stronger and stronger. So be consistent and that way it will help to cement those relationships with your fellow members even more.

In module four I will be covering the referral process as well as how to continue to build relationships and create a great lasting impression with the follow-up system and your commitments.

Action:

Is there someone already in your network who you briefly know? What can you do now to revisit that relationship to strengthen it? Take action on this soon. If people see that you are starting to become busy, they sometimes think you're too busy to take on more work OR they think you've forgotten about them.

Start making a list of people you can reconnect with and then schedule time to reconnect.

Summary

- Ensure you fully understand the importance of building a relationship with your networking colleagues and not selling to them; they are the gateway to your success and your dream team to you achieving your outcomes.
- Never make assumptions about the type of people or personalities in the group; you just never know who they are connected to.
- Make sure you make the effort and take action with one-to-one sessions with fellow members so that you stand out as a proactive business owner. You'll also be seen as someone who is genuinely interested in supporting your network which builds trust in you.
- Be clear about the support you are seeking from your business community whether it be advice, mentoring, training, strategic alliances etc. If you are clear, then others will understand how to help you.
- Never stop relationship building. Instead, see it as seasonal and at the start of each season revisit the one-to-one sessions so that you can keep updated and regularly informed on developments of their business and support you can offer.

Awesome! This is third of 10 modules... when you're ready, let's move on to module four.