

ESSENTIAL TOOLS NEEDED TO GET RESULTS AND THRIVE FROM YOUR NETWORKING

MODULE SIX

Module Six – Networking Events

Contents

Boosting Your Confidence - Planning: Mistakes VAs Make.....	2
Make Time.....	2
Plan and Prepare or Prepare to Fail.....	3
Approach Networking Like a Business Project.....	4
Walking into a Room Full of Strangers!.....	7
Act and Smile!.....	8
Breathe!.....	8
Cultivating the Confident Voice.....	10
Let Your Passion Shine Through.....	11
It's Not About You.....	11
Approaching Groups.....	12
Summary.....	14

Boosting Your Confidence - Planning: Mistakes VAs Make

In the previous section I shared with you the importance of and how to boost your confidence by changing your mindset. A negative or desperate mindset and lack of confidence can sometimes detract clients, and people want to be able to build trust in you and your confidence in your abilities. You can significantly boost your confidence when it comes to networking by planning.

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

- They don't plan their networking attendance and then panic when it comes nearer to and on the day of the event, then will either not go or not make the impression they wanted to at the event;
- They don't plan what they want to say and end up creating an incorrect message about the role they play and leave people confused;
- They don't plan ahead for their networking and therefore leave their preparation to the last minute;
- They don't communicate with their clients in advance or have any boundaries which means a lack of contingency planning and support for their clients on the day or they just don't go because their client needs them.

Does any of this sound familiar?

Make Time

In module two of this e-course I mentioned the importance of making time for your networking and that includes telling your clients when you will be out of office. It's amazing how many times I've heard VAs say that they had to cancel their networking because their 'biggest' client needed them.

So let me ask you an important question: "Who is your most important client?"

It's a trick question – please remember **you** are your most important client. You need clients to pay you – but without you working ON your business, your business will not grow.

I must reiterate again the importance of planning in advance and this includes preplanning your client tasks, communicating with your clients of your availability and communicating with your associates as to how they can support you once or twice a month when you're at your networking meetings. Maybe even use a call answering service to cover you – I use one in my business and can thoroughly recommend them. Simply message me for an introduction.

If you are having your weekly updates with your clients, you can avoid many unnecessary last minute emergencies. You do also have to educate your clients sometimes as to the importance of those regular updates, whether they are weekly or fortnightly. It helps you and helps them to keep focused and prepared.

If a client calls you then you need to be strong and state that you're unable to support them immediately. However, talk through when you can commence the task and, if the proposed timeframe does not suit both parties, work out who on your team can support them instead.

By coming across as calm, confident and prepared, you will instil confidence and trust.

If a task needs doing that day, you can say something like "I'm not going to be able to focus on this task just now as I do have another pre-planned commitment, however, there are two options, I can either commence this when I am next available at 2pm or I can have my associate complete it for you and I can pass on the instructions for you to save you time. Which is the preferred option for you?". As long as the client is aware of what can be done they will normally feel better. This only works if you have regular back up support with an associate.

Plan and Prepare or Prepare to Fail

You can help to build your confidence by preparation – know the venue for the event and how you are going to get there. If it's a new location, use something like Google maps or SatNav to plan your route, check for any road works going on which may delay your journey.

Feel comfortable about yourself and plan what you are going to wear. Don't turn up at a networking meeting wearing high stilettos. OK, if you are a man you're probably not wearing stilettos, but feel comfortable in your shoes. Wear something that stands out. Now I am not saying turn up with a high viz jacket or a fluorescent skirt, but maybe a magenta pink cardigan - something that's going to stand out and make you memorable.

Be confident about what you are going to say. As part of your preparation, when you know what you are saying, you will feel a whole lot more confident about yourself. Knowing what to say, questions to ask and how to give your networking presentation, will be covered in part seven and eight... so you're saved!!

As part of your preparation, let's go through a few important points here:

This preparation will definitely help boost your confidence and I know because I have seen it with so many people and experienced this myself when going to a new group:

1. If you have the opportunity (and I would create the opportunity) speak to the host of that particular networking meeting in advance to both introduce

yourself (partly to also check that if this group only allows one person per industry, that there isn't already another VA who is a member) and to find out more about the group and meetings as per below:

- Get a feel for what to expect: check whether you will just be going to mingle with people or whether you are expected to give a one minute or forty second pitch;
 - How many people are in the group?
 - What type of industries are represented within the group?
 - Is it where one person per industry goes, or is it a mix of industries, so it doesn't matter if there is another VA going as well;
 - Make sure you know where the venue is and check if there is parking;
 - Ask whether they'll buddy you with one of the members, perhaps even to go as far as asking for introductions with particular people;
 - Establish how many members are there and how members have benefitted from the group;
 - Find out what the meeting fee is and how you can make payment;
 - Ask if they provide a list of attendees pre- and/or post-meeting.
2. Arrive earlier than everyone else! If you can arrive 15 – 30 minutes early to that meeting, you can pop to the loo, freshen up, put your coat away and get chatting to the organiser.

This is a great opportunity to ask for help. Ask if they can introduce you to any particular members or have a look at the list of attendees and say: "Great! I would like to be introduced to that person, is that OK?" Now they are not going to turn round and say "Of course not! Do it yourself!" because they have to make the networking meetings work, otherwise nobody would bother being a member.

You are asking the organiser to be introduced to people which is fantastic. That means, as they arrive, people are going to approach you to talk. So you don't have to do any of the approaching.

Approach Networking Like a Business Project

All projects need managing effectively, don't they?! As a VA you are a superb asset to support your clients with their business projects, therefore, treat networking as a project that needs managing by you.

You must manage your networking, or it will manage you.

I mentioned my dedicated networking notebook earlier. It doesn't matter what you use, as long as it's something that works for you. The purpose is that you can plan as well as monitor your networking activities. So track who you meet, what you talk about, potential connections etc.

As part of your preparation, as shared in previous sections of this e-course, you must know exactly what you want in terms of outcomes and in terms of the help or support

you are seeking from your networking activities. Why do you need to know? Well, quite simply, if you don't know your outcomes you can't set your goals and then you can't establish the actions you need to take. Secondly, without knowing your outcomes, you won't be clear on the support you need, and people will be asking you what help you're looking for. You could be talking to a very influential person at your next networking meeting and if you're unclear about what you want then you've missed a great opportunity.

How many times have you started off your day with good intentions to focus on something for your business, just to find distractions or for something to happen that takes you off into a different direction, thereby leaving the task unfinished? Frustrating isn't it! Again, quite simply, if you are not planning your activities with no clear direction of what must be achieved, then it's very easy to be steered off track.

Have an aim and a purpose for each of your networking meetings and any outside networking activity, and only then will you find yourself moving towards that purpose. You'll also find that you remain much more focused.

As part of your planning you also need to establish the groups you wish to attend (covered in previous sections). Once you have evaluated and chosen a possible group or groups to join, as part of your strategy for networking, find out how the other members became successful. I'd also be asking them about their strategy. The reason for this is to establish how effective this group will be for your business and how relevant it will be to helping you achieve your outcomes. This will help to avoid joining groups that will just waste your time. Not every group will be relevant to you as a person. The more research you do the better.

As with many projects, networking can take up lots of your time, which you are now making time for. Therefore, it's even more important to have some targets in place and monitor your results, like you would with any project. Measure what you achieved from your last meeting against the next one. Otherwise you'll find that you're drifting.

To help you measure your results from the networking groups you attend, use the following table to create aims for your meetings and measure results. Change the information to what you need according to what works for you:

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
What is my aim for today's meeting?			
Ideal connections (people) - describing words			
Group name and type			
Group profile/sector/interests (relevance to me)			
Tactics - what works well? Ask for tips			
My elevator speech (for this group). What is my focus?			
What I can do to support these members?			
What help do I want from these members?			
What are my targets and expectations for the next meeting?			
What actions must I have actioned to ensure I reach my targets?			
Which members or visitors am I following up with? (after the meeting)			
What is my purpose for the follow-ups?			

You may want to approach this with just one networking group at a time.

Ensure you are careful not to spread yourself too thinly with too many groups; you'll water down your time and it'll be more overwhelming trying to keep up with the activities.

Without having a strategy for your networking, you are just going for a nice lunch!

Although when starting out as a VA, I always suggest becoming a networking tart! Visit as many groups as you can to identify which groups are the right fit for you and your business.

Walking into a Room Full of Strangers!

So many VAs have said to me: “I am absolutely terrified about walking into a room full of strangers”.

I have said: “That’s OK, because these are just people you haven’t got to know yet”.

Then they say: “I am not very good at networking”, “I find that my hands are shaking or my voice goes all jittery”, “My legs are shaking”, “I just don’t have the confidence to go up to anyone when I arrive to speak to them”, “I don’t know what to say”.

We have all been there, but learn strategies to deal with it.

The lack of confidence, for a lot of people, starts before they have even got to the networking meeting. In fact, quite a few of them have told me that they have done a really good job of talking themselves out of going. They have not even turned up. Well then it’s no wonder they are not getting a return on their investment.

In the previous section where I go into detail about confidence, remember an important point: what you tell yourself you act out and you become that behaviour. The more you tell yourself you can’t do something, the more you can’t do it.

So now think about some of the situations you have experienced where you were really excited but may have been a bit shaky. Maybe your throat went a bit dry but actually it was excitement. Maybe think back to the first date you ever had - you were a little bit nervous but you were really excited as well and so you got that little shakiness going.

So be very careful because it could be that you are really excited about going to a networking event. You are excited about getting to know people, excited about standing up and saying something about your business. You know, don’t you, that standing up and saying something about your business AND people listening to you, means you have a great opportunity for raising your profile and awareness of what you do! If you say it’s scary, then how is it scary specifically?

It starts off with your mindset.

If this is the first ever networking meeting you are going to, or the first group you are going to, where is the evidence that you are not good at networking?

I bet that you have been networking for a long time, more than you realise, as you have been doing it on a personal basis, maybe at a party or a wedding reception when you were speaking with people you don’t know. Perhaps you knew some people there or maybe you were sat next to someone you don’t know but you remained friendly while getting to know them. You asked them a bit about themselves, what they did for a living, you might have noticed they had children

there so you asked them about their children or you asked them about their business or their career.

We all do it.

We all network in a personal sense but something turns a switch in a lot of us that says it's scary when you do it for business and we experience a loss of confidence. Suddenly women find it intimidating to walk into a room where there are men. Well actually, not every man is scary and I always ask where is the evidence that these men are scary? 99% of the people that I have met in networking situations, both men and women, have been lovely.

Act and Smile!

When we are growing up we model ourselves on the people around us - our parents, our peers, and our teachers - anyone who has an influence over us.

You might find that when you are talking you hear your mother's voice; I know that when I am talking I sound just like my mother. My mannerisms and body language are very similar to hers.

Often when people feel nervous they speed up when they talk and their pitch becomes higher. I've often heard VAs say that they try and say what they have to say quickly in order to get it over and done with. Why? This is your golden opportunity to connect with someone in the room, if you speak too quickly how will they hear what you have to say?

If you talk with a very high pitched voice people switch off, especially if you also talk quickly. By using a lower voice, a little bit like Margaret Thatcher perhaps, you will have a greater air of confidence, authority and control, and it is more appealing to more people's ears.

Talking at a steady pace will help people to capture the words that you are saying.

It's coupled with breathing because when you are feeling a lack of confidence and nervous, you start to talk quickly and your breathing gets faster and faster and you are trying to catch your breath and you can't really get the next word in but you want to say it quickly just so you can get it over and done with and sit down again and ... nobody has heard a single word you have said.

Breathe!

Breathe!!! Breathe in deeply through your nose and breathe out slowly through your mouth. Just keep doing that. By controlling your breathing, you will talk at a much steadier pace with a lower voice and people will listen to you. They will like listening to you and you will feel calmer.

If you would like to try a guided breathing exercise, there are lots on Youtube – it is about finding one that you resonate with. However, a lot of people I know have benefited from this one: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzzb3jHhgeU>

If you are telling yourself you are not confident or you are nervous then your speech will become quicker and quicker. That does not help you and it does not help your confidence.

So model people whom you admire as good networkers or good presenters. Notice their body language and how they engage with people. How they build a rapport in a networking meeting because building a rapport is very important. Model yourself on that person.

Act as if you are a confident person. Up until now you have been acting very well as somebody who is nervous and with no confidence. So if you are that good at acting then you can act as someone who is confident. You have modelled yourself on other people so act like them; you have picked up on tonality, on the pace at which they talk, their body language and how they engage with people.

We do buy into acting. I am sure many of you have watched a film and you are either laughing away or you are in tears because you believe the person you are watching to be the character but they are playing that role. They are acting.

Inside you might feel different, but on the outside you are acting and smiling.

People are so much more attractive when they smile and they are so much more approachable when they smile.

Smile, smile, smile - it is really important.

When you smile you start to feel good. When you are not feeling happy forcing your face to smile actually sends a different reaction and message to your brain, telling it you are now happy and eventually you start to feel different.

So when you smile, you stand up straight, your breathing is controlled, you tell yourself positive affirmations and positive statements. You think differently; you tell yourself how excited you are about going to this networking meeting and your confidence will shine through.

All of these actions are guaranteed. This is absolutely true; it sends a message to the brain to change the way you feel.

Cultivating the Confident Voice

“Be bold, be bold...”

From the old English fairytale, The Tale of Mr Fox

You may be asking: "How does one stay confident all the time? How do I put myself first instead of worrying about pleasing others? How can I reduce thinking too much about the many consequences and stay focused?"

Remember to act ‘as if’ (verisimilitude) from module five.

One of the essential ingredients to speaking powerfully and authoritatively in business is confidence. You can spot a confident person by their body language, their tone of voice and clear speaking presence.

It may be the environment you find yourself in or the people you are with that stops you from expressing yourself. You may feel inhibited or self-conscious because of it.

Or else it may be your thinking that gets in the way of your speaking out clearly.

Get out of people’s heads!”

Behave towards yourself as though you were an encouraging friend. Pay attention to when you do things right and when things work out to how successful you have been. Move your attention away from giving yourself a hard time by imagining what others think.

And take risks. Take small steps to give you success. Follow hunches, keep faith with your ideas, do things your way.

“Just Do It!”

Nike Ad

Some confidence tips:

- Giving eye contact and walking tall always conveys confidence.
- Breathe more deeply because it supports the voice. Focus on the out-breath - breathe out through your mouth for as long as possible, then in through the nose. That really helps to calm you down as well. You can do it sitting, standing or walking down a corridor.
- You may have adopted the habit of lifting your voice at the end of sentences as though you are asking a question. To the listener you sound hesitant and

unsure of yourself. Bring your intonation down at the end of phrases when stating a fact, like a newsreader. You will sound definite, purposeful and credible.

- Use the major rather than the minor key in your intonation. The major key in music tends to be warmer and more buoyant.
- Take your time over your words. Take ownership of them. It gives you authority.
- Be purposeful when you are talking to an audience, keep your sentence to 10 words. Aim those 10 words at one of your audience and wait to watch that thought land. Then the next 10-word sentence to another person.
- In order to be effective in business, you must take extremely good care of yourself. Your voice is the instrument that reflects how you feel about yourself. If you care for yourself, your voice will reflect that - and vice versa

Let Your Passion Shine Through

Let your passion shine through! You know this is your business! Love it! Love talking about it!

For some people their lack of confidence comes from feeling embarrassed by talking about themselves and they worry that they are coming across as salesy. You don't have to be salesy.

Love what you do. The one comment I receive time and time again is: "You have an amazing energy and a passion for what you do". I say: "I know! I love it! I love what I do. I love inspiring, supporting and challenging VAs to become a success in their businesses. I love giving them the skills, resources and secrets to marketing their business and how to network effectively. I love it!".

And that's the sort of impression you want to make with people. You don't want to be talking so that you think "I really don't want to be doing this".

As part of your confidence let your passion about what you do shine through. Remember it's not all about you. There will be other people attending the event who are also thinking: "Oh gosh. I don't know what to say. I'm not feeling very confident. I feel nervous". How lovely that they have someone like you to approach them and make them feel comfortable.

It's Not About You

When you walk into a room and it is already full of people you could ask the organiser to introduce you to somebody - explain that this is your first time networking and you would like to get to know people.

Please don't say that you are feeling very nervous or not very confident because then you are sending out the wrong message and you are reaffirming what has possibly been in your mindset up until now.

Keep that away. Get rid of that gremlin.

What would be the worse case scenario? If I walked up to somebody and said: "Hello my name is Amanda Johnson and this is my first time at this networking meeting, I would like to get to know you and your business, what do you do?"

You know it doesn't really matter how you start off that first conversation, it's the fact that you are going up to someone and starting that conversation, which is the most important thing.

A great place to go and start a conversation is the table with tea and coffee, especially when you have to help yourself as it is natural to offer: "Would you like me to pour your tea as well?" and then ask "How did you get here today?" or "Did you find the traffic bad today?" or "This seems like a room full of really fantastic people doesn't it, the energy is just buzzing in here, isn't it?" or "Is this your first time here?" or "What are you hoping to get out of this networking meeting today?"

Part of your confidence is preparing questions that you can ask people so that you are not blankly staring at someone thinking "Oh my gosh, my mouth has just dried up, I haven't got a clue what to ask". You can avoid that just by thinking and practising some questions which show interest in the other person.

Be aware and remember that:

- It is OK if this is your first experience of networking;
- It is OK to ask people to be introduced to somebody;
- It is OK to approach somebody;
- By doing it, time and time again, you will become very confident at it. It will become second nature.

Approaching Groups

What about if everyone is chatting amongst themselves in groups? What do you do?

Well, as I said earlier, aim to arrive early so that people approach you. But you may have been chatting to somebody and closed the conversation, shook hands, exchanged business cards and now you want to go and talk to someone else, except now you have all these groups of people.

So look at the body language. If there are two or three people talking and their feet are facing one another and they look like they are talking quite intently then do not interrupt them. Now, if you notice that at least one foot is faced outwards and the

other foot is loosely facing the group then it is because they are ready to go shortly. Walk up to that group and look for a little gap. Now don't say: "Hello everybody I'm Amanda, just thought I would say hello". There is nothing worse than being interrupted. If someone is talking just walk into that gap and smile and listen and when that person has finished just say "I wonder if its OK to join you there. I didn't catch the beginning of that conversation but what I have just heard was very interesting" and maybe offer your comments. Or wait until someone says: "And so, who are you?".

It's absolutely OK to do that. But remember, and this is a really important point, they may be a room full of strangers now but you are going to make the effort to get to know people. You are going to have those one-to-ones. You are going to have the follow up conversation. You are going to get to know them because you are being consistent with your networking. So they won't be strangers for long. They are just amazing people who are ready to get to know you.

People are very welcoming and supportive and when they know or notice that there is someone who is new to the group they welcome you and they look after you.

Action:

1. Write a list of the groups you currently network at.
2. Capture what you like / dislike about the groups.
3. Be honest with yourself – do you have a plan for networking within these groups.
4. Look at the exercise detailed earlier in this module and carry it out for all of your current meetings.
5. Google networking options in your local area.
6. Ask your local connections where they network.
7. Identify dates of forthcoming meetings and plan to attend at least two new meetings to see if they add value to your business.
8. Ensure your networking strategy is part of your marketing and business plan!

Summary

- Have the business mindset and attitude when it comes to networking, and that includes making the time, planning with your clients your non-availability and ensuring you've planned your associate support.
- Plan everything you need to attend a networking event with confidence - from what you are going to say, what you are wearing, people you want to meet, outcomes you want to achieve, researching the group, to simply where you are going.
- Approach your networking like a project and ensure you are analysing your results; remember, without a plan you are just going for coffee or lunch!
- Remember that the people you do not know are not strangers, they're just friends you've not met yet. Never think it's scary because the members are all supportive.
- Act like the person you want to model and also just be yourself; breathe and keep calm as it's always a great opportunity to meet people, you never know the opportunities which will follow.
- Speak with passion about your business and what you help your clients to achieve, it's very attractive when you're passionate about your business.