

## HAPPY NEW YEAR – GET TO WORK

By: Robert S. Sher

Remember the good 'ole days when work just walked in the door?

I've been getting calls from clients and scared business executives telling me their phones are not ringing and that key customers have cut back, gone out of business or are sending their work out for bid.

They all ask the same question: What should I do to survive? It all depends on what you are looking for.

Networking is a great place to start. It is an investment everyone should make and one that should not be taken lightly.

There are many ways to network. I like groups dedicated exclusively to helping each member boost business sales. They are strategic and you pay to join so those who do so are generally committed to the core purpose of referring business leads to other members of the group.

My son, Michael a real estate broker, tells me his local Business Networking International chapter has helped boost his house sales significantly. Referrals from the group now amount to 40% of his business.

The group allows one person per profession to join and meets one morning a week before work. Each member gets ample floor time and members refer other members for opportunities.

"If I meet someone at a community event, referrals are not definite," Michael says. "It is like going to the gym without a plan. BNI has a single purpose. We go there to get referrals. It is structured and everyone is there to get business."

Networking is not like screwing in a light bulb. You need to spend time investing in others so they are confident enough to recommend you to someone else as a person who can get something done. Most people will not recommend someone they do not know or someone they think might not be able to get the job done.

If you take the time to tell 30 people each week about your business and ask about their businesses, you will have 30 people who know what you do and have a good feeling about your competencies. Then, when opportunities arise, you can each feel comfortable recommending one another. (Don't forget to say thanks for every referral, whether it results in business or not.)

Business networking is leveraging your business and personal connections to bring you a regular supply of new business. It is far more extensive than showing up at functions, shaking hands, smiling and collecting cards. It is about being proactive, making new contacts, nurturing them and building meaningful relationships.

“It’s like six degrees of separation,” Michael says. “Each of us knows at least 100 other people. It is very effective and it teaches us what we want and teaches us to ask for the right things.”

How many people do you know? How many of these people know what you do for work? Why don’t you tell them what you do and what you want? Perhaps you might ask everyone you know how business is going and offer to help make referrals for them.

While each person you meet is not going to be able to help move your business to the next level, everything you do can be driven by the desire to grow your business. Be proactive. Do something new each week to develop a relationship. Call someone for lunch or go out for a cup of coffee. Talk to a new parent in the Hebrew school lobby while waiting for pickup.

Every conversation, PTA meeting, party invitation, soccer game or tennis class is a networking opportunity. Somebody somewhere always knows something or someone you don’t. Make a conscious effort to do something strategic every week to help grow your business.

Networking for business growth must be strategic and focused. You must figure out a plan to capitalize on the contacts you make. The better you are at it, the more business will come your way and the better your chances will be at surviving in these challenging times.

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