



Parmesan Garlic Wings with a Side Order of Networking

August 28, 2009

By Dan Norman

I attended a weekly business networking lunch at Hooters recently and it was packed. Not surprising, since they're known for great chicken wings, among other things.

I sat next to a guy named Robert, who walked in just as we were taking our seats for lunch. He didn't say much except that he was really busy at work and thought about skipping this particular networking event. But since he missed the last three and this one was at Hooters, he felt compelled to be there. Following the announcements and a few dozen wings, he handed me his business card and said he needed to leave to make sales calls. He actually made a few cold calls on the way out, but the servers didn't appear interested.

That evening I pulled Robert's card from the unusually large stack I accumulated that day. (Remember, it was at Hooters.) His was easy to find because it was the one with Parmesan garlic wing sauce fingerprints all over it. He was a sales representative with an engineering services company. This struck me as odd since business-to-business salespeople normally find a lot of value in networking and connecting with others. They usually make it a high priority, but "Parmesan Garlic Bobby" was late arriving and early leaving.

All of us are very busy at work with not nearly enough hours to simply get done what needs to be done. Each day we rush through the things we need to do so we can then go do other things. And at the end of the day we rush home to spend what time is left with our family and friends. Why then should we prioritize attending networking events that require blocking out a couple of hours a week from our already busy schedules?

Making Connections

Consider the fact that each of us probably has a circle of business connections — people we help and who help us achieve our goals. And each of us routinely shares some of our circle of connections with others when we see an opportunity for mutual benefit. Recently, I sat down and made a list of all the people I connected to others in the past couple of years, and the number came to 77. Just to be clear, I don't walk around handing out my list of 77 names to everyone I meet when I'm networking. However, I sometimes provide several introductions to people who I think can receive value from, or provide value to, my 77 connections.

I'm sure those of you reading this are much more popular than I am and probably have more than 77 connections on your list. But, regardless of the fact that people like you more than me, let's assume you're out at a networking event and meet 10 people. If those 10 people also have 77 connections, you have just expanded your "potential" connections to 770. That doesn't mean the next time you're out networking you should ask everyone you meet for their full list of 77 connections.

“So Dan,” you ask, “how do we get this golden list of 77 from everyone we meet if we can’t ask for it?”

It’s all based on gratitude and interdependence. Connect with others to genuinely help them first. When we get to know people, share our values with them and help them first, they generally want to help us in return. And the degree to which they want to help, based on the gratitude they may feel for our having helped them, will be much greater. The return in value could be immediate as a result of this mutually beneficial relationship, or it may turn out to be a long-term benefit when we get a referral a year later from someone we helped, but it *will* happen.

Putting in a Good Word

I have a friend in sales who attends networking events twice a week. Her husband was recently laid off from his job, so he hit the streets looking for a new one. He found one that matched his background, interviewed for the position and was strongly being considered for the position. My friend sent a note to her network of connections asking if any of them were familiar with the company and might be able to provide her husband with some insight. Not only did she get responses from seven of her connections, but three of them contacted someone they knew at the company and put in a good word for her husband. He got the job and gained an appreciation for the value of connections. Now he attends networking events at least twice a month even though he’s in logistics and not sales.

The connections you make while networking can be invaluable to you as a source of new customers as well as for finding a new job, connecting with resources to help you grow your business and helping friends and family with personal issues. So, next time you go to a networking event, get there early and make “connecting” the main dish and the parmesan garlic wings a side order.

Dan Norman is a sales performance expert, a professional speaker, a columnist and the author of Top Ten Selling – The Lumberjack Chronicles. He has hired and developed thousands of sales representatives and hundreds of sales managers. For more information, visit www.toptenselling.com or call 407-566-9741.

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