



Annette Estes
Columnist

Professional Development

To market we go

Group Coaching can produce remarkable results. I recently conducted just five minutes of group coaching for an organization to which I belong – Professional Network Connections. I asked the members what they'd like to be coached on – some challenge we all face as businesswomen. They chose marketing.

Coaching is different from consulting in that the coach is not the expert with all the answers – the participants are.

So I asked the group first what their marketing challenges are, then I asked them to give their best marketing tips. Here are their suggestions.

Business Cards. A business card can make you look successful or second rate, depending on the quality of the card stock, printing, and design. A high-quality business card is essential for marketing your business. Several in the group said their cards are printed on both sides. This can make your card a mini-brochure.

However, keep in mind that when networking, it's more important for you to get other people's cards than for them to get yours. If they've expressed an interest in your business, you'll want to follow up with them rather than hope they'll follow up with you.

Networking. To promote your business you must be "out there" as much as possible. Be advised that networking is not prospecting. You're not there to sell. You're there to meet people and find out if they're potential customers or clients. The most important thing to do when networking – or selling – is to ask people questions. Let them talk about themselves. If they ask what you do, give them your 30-second commercial then turn the conversation back to what they do. No one will become your customer unless they need or want your product or service. The only way you can find that out is to ask questions, listen, then feedback what they've said to make sure (and let them know) you heard them.

Join the Chamber of Commerce. I've been a member of the Greenville Chamber for nearly 14 years. At first I wasn't very active. I was like those who think you can join the Chamber and business will automatically come to you. Not. After a few years, I thought about dropping my membership because I wasn't "getting my money's worth." My mentor, the late Jim Cockman, strongly advised me not to do that. He

said anyone who wants to be successful in business must belong to the Chamber (at least one). So I stayed and became more involved.

The Chamber, as a rule, doesn't recommend individual members to prospective clients. However, a woman recently hired me to coach her daughter who had a graduate school interview the following week. I asked how she'd heard of me and she said another of her daughters had worked with a local coach in the past, but that coach was out of town and her daughter needed help right away. She called the Chamber, got names of coaches, and called me.

Speaking. One of the best ways to become known as an expert in your field is to speak to groups on topics that interest them and give tips they need. We're all in business to serve people, so giving some free advice to a group of people can result in paying clients. Just be sure to give solid information they can use and don't make your presentation a 20-minute commercial. It's fine to tell a few success stories about people you've helped, though.

One of my colleagues tells his audience at the end of a talk that he's going to give them a "shameless plug" for his business. And that's the only time he mentions it.

Website. If you own a business and don't have a good website, you might as well not have a telephone. I am impressed by people whose email address is "name@mybiz.com." Conversely, people whose email address is "mybiz@aol.com" make me wonder when they're going to enter the 21st century.

Find a professional web designer and get a website that clearly reflects how your business serves others. I'll give some website design tips in a future column.

Word of Mouth. We all know this is the best marketing tool you can have. Referrals are the best way to get new business. You can and should be proactive and ask your customers for referrals. But how wonderful it is when someone hires or buys from you because someone told them how great you/your company are.

The only way to get this type of business is to put other people's needs above your desire to prosper. Be about service and integrity. Give added value. Do your best every day.

Here's to your business, and if I can help in any way, let me know.

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