

Becoming a “Savvy Networker” to Build Your Business Success



By
Bonnie Ross-Parker
America's Connection Diva!
CEO/Founder of Xperience Connections
www.BonnieRossParker.com

I'm thrilled that you want to increase your networking effectiveness! I'm going to begin Part 1 of a 5-part series entitled "Are You a Savvy Networker?" I'll be offering a variety of techniques to increase your networking skills, and my ideas will work whether you're promoting your business, yourself or others. I am here to support your efforts to make your networking experiences joyful and productive. My goal is to provide you with as many practical and valuable ideas as I can, and you can apply them anywhere. You might consider using some of the techniques I'm going to share not only at Chamber of Commerce gatherings, but also at conferences or at any networking events.

Introduction

While most of us recognize the importance of networking, for many individuals, it's a challenge to go out and do it. There are many definitions for networking. **I describe networking as a systematic process of meeting people, learning about them and establishing relationships, allowing all parties to create an expanded band of resources to support their endeavors.** It is organized and purposeful. The value of your network is determined to the degree its members are diverse, strong, credible and relevant to you and your profession. You know what networking is not. It is not:

- Handing out business cards at an event
- Thinking that everyone you meet needs or wants your service
- Doing all the talking is not networking.

People connect effectively when they can engage in conversations, listen for similarities and find ways to support others by being resourceful themselves.

Networking Starts with Conversation

Every networking experience starts with a conversation, and with some of you, just getting started may cause anxiety. So you meet somebody and you'd like to start a conversation and you're not sure what to do? One way to get started is just to get to know someone. You meet someone. You introduce yourself. You say, "Hi, my name is _____, and I'm just so delighted to have a chance to chat with you! And I'm just curious, where are you from"? And that can generate a conversation. If they are from a different area, you can find out when they moved, how long they lived there, what caused them to move, or if they are from the area you

live in currently, you can comment on that and say, "you know, I don't often meet people from this area." You might ask somebody, not only where they're from, but where they like to go on vacation, you can maybe find out a little bit about their hobbies or their interests. Anything that is neutral is a great way to simply to start a conversation.

You want to get questions that are easy, that are interesting, that don't put anyone on the defensive, but really shows that you are interested. **Because, you see, when networking, one of the most effective ways to make connections is to make conversations.** When you start, it lets others know that you are interested in them and puts them at ease. You get to find out information that helps you decide whether this person can benefit from what you have to offer. You get answers when you ask questions. Simply begin a conversation in order to get both of you to get to talk and listen to each other. Networking is about sharing information and developing relationships. When you feel good about someone, you choose to do business together.

Another thing I want to mention is that it's great to initiate conversations when you're somewhere and you see somebody standing alone. You go up to them and you put out your hand and you say, "Hi, my name is _____, I'd love to have a chance to get to know you." **By putting someone else at ease, you'd be amazed at how open they will be to have a conversation with you.** You can invite them to engage in a conversation with a third party by saying, "Hey, I'd love for you to meet a friend of mine. Why don't you come



Approach
Someone Alone

join this group?" Or you could say to somebody if it's a sit-down event, "Listen, why don't I take your purse or briefcase and put it near where I'm going to be sitting so I can introduce you to the individuals that are going to be there." Anything you do that initiates a conversation and puts somebody else at ease, is going to be huge brownie points for you. So if you've been hesitant to initiate conversations in the past, this is a good time to get started. Try some of my examples.

Now I want to share some ideas for open-ended starters, particularly in the business arena. **Unlike yes or no questions, open-ended statements generate a lot more information to lead to conversations that are more business related.** So here are some suggestions to begin a conversation when you really want to generate a business kind of connection. You can ask someone, for instance, "How did you get started in the business that you are in?" That's always a great question, because it usually leads to some sort of history, which is helpful to you if you want to find out more about whether your product or service can be of benefit to this person.

You can say to someone, "What do you enjoy most about your profession?" That's usually a great door opener, because not everybody is happy with what they're doing, but by focusing on the positive and saying, "Hey, what do you enjoy most about your profession," you get some key clues as to what it is that they enjoy. You can ask somebody, "How do you differ from your competition?" This is particularly beneficial if you're talking to somebody that is in real estate or financial planning or mortgage, anyone where there is a really competitive edge or competitive marketplace.

It's nice to **find out what distinguishes or what differentiates somebody from their competition.** If they focus on a particular part of the profession, that's a great way to keep them in mind should the need from somebody else come to bear and you'd like to be able to help them. Another good open-ended question, "What were you doing prior to what you're doing now?" This is a great question to ask somebody because it gives you a chance to find out what they had done previously, and that's always very interesting to know as well. It also tells you whether they jump from career to career or if they're pretty steady in one thing. It tells you a little bit about the background of someone. It's kind of fun anyway to know what someone was doing before they're doing their current profession. It gets them thinking and it also lets you see how well connected they are with the future of their industry.

What do you see as **trends in your industry?**" This is a great question just to kind of get an idea whether they are seeing changes in how they are adapting to change. Of course, another one would be, "What do you like most about your career?" That's always revealing. And lastly, "What do you find is your biggest challenge?" That question is a lot nicer than, "Well, what don't you like about your career?" A lot of people don't want to focus on the negative, but if you say what's your biggest challenge, then you can find out a little bit more - they're not getting paid enough, they're over worked, it's difficult to keep up with technology, the changes in the industry are making their industry and their profession or their business less viable in a competitive marketplace. So that's another great thing to be aware of.

These questions foster conversation, they give you a chance to get to know the person you're talking with without being personal, and it's really a lot more interest than just saying, "So, what do you do?" When people ask me that, sometimes I'll be a bit flippant and I'll say, "About what?" And they look, and I'll say, "What do I do about what?" So you can see, asking

Open-ended questions generate a lot more information, which lead to conversations that are more business related.

someone about what profession they're in or, my husband sometimes will say, "What keeps you most occupied during the day?" Which is the same as saying, "What job do you fulfill?"

Anything that generates a conversation is great. Allowing the person you meet to share shows you really care about them, and eventually the conversation will swing to you. **That's when it's critical to know exactly what you want to share and what distinguishes you from any of your competitors.** You don't want to be one of the choices from many competitors. Your job is to be THE choice. While you value whom you are and what you offer, recognize the selling success and what you provide, is directly linked to your ability to connect with others. You accomplish this by focusing on the needs of those you meet.

Your goal in a networking situation is to listen, to learn, to initiate and to find ways you can bring your skills, ideas and resources and support to the people who will value you because you value them. You must be unique. Distinguish yourself from others, especially those in the same industry. You know, remember when you were young, and fitting in meant doing the same thing as everyone else in the crowd? Peer pressure played a major role in our development. In order to be accepted by our peers, we wanted to be just like them. We see that today in the teenage community where everyone seems to dress alike, look alike, like the same things and so on. Being the same was the way of establishing acceptance and approval, but in the business world, the opposite is true. You will have a huge advantage when you initiate. You direct the conversation, you get the information you need, and it will position you to be as supportive and perhaps a business choice by those individuals when you show you care about them.

This brings us to the end of Part I - Focusing on initiating and carrying out conversations. The next segment I will be offering to you is Ideas for Follow-up and Follow-through.

Money is in the Follow-up

In this section, I'm going to share some thoughts on follow-up. Money is in the follow-up. Ever wonder why your efforts aren't producing the results you want? Are you working from slips of paper, post-it notes and a shoebox full of business cards? Can't keep track of leads, so far behind, you have no clue how to catch up? You are not alone. It sounds like a plan would be helpful. Networking for over 27 years, it's obvious to me that **there are fundamental strategies and principles that are timeless in their value to help us stay focused and are a critical component to running a successful business.** Without hesitation, follow-up remains a key factor. This is especially true in anything related to marketing. In providing numerous workshops over the years, I remind participants they can work their business part-time or full-

time, but sometime is not an option. Sometime only works if you don't want to move forward. Follow-up means having an action plan and a commitment to goals that are measurable.

Choosing to consistently follow-up as the way to operate sets a pattern that combats laziness, keeps you focused and strengthens your determination. How does one make follow-up a habit? Take a look at your results and identify where a well thought out plan is in your best interests.



Consistently
Follow-up

You may:

- Begin with daily "to do" lists, a reliable "Day Timer" or even a PDA.
- Decide that every business card you keep will be entered into a database.
- Plan your schedule daily; promise to accomplish what you set out to do.
- Be honest with yourself; only you know the demands in your life, and only you know your responsibilities.

If in hearing this, I've hit a raw nerve, that's exactly my intention. It is my desire to get you to change your behavior. Consider the consequences of the bad business habits you've acquired and do something to change direction. One important key is to follow-up. However, if you already have a follow-up plan and consistently exercise positive and productive behavior, then consider this part simply great reinforcement

If you are in business, and I doesn't matter whether you offer products or services, it's imperative you have a follow-up system. A lead that is not interested today may be open to what you offer at a later time. (Critical distinction: A sale occurs NOT when you're ready to deliver. It occurs when the buyer is ready to purchase! *If you don't stay 'top of mind' with your potential customer/client, someone else will!*) Do you write personal notes after meeting someone with whom you wish to stay connected? You know, and so do I, email is the lazier form of communication. While, it is better than no communication, if you really want to make a difference in someone else's life, and leave a positive impression, you need to do it with written notes. Other helpful tools include:

- Sending articles that may be of interest to a potential client
- Inviting prospects to an upcoming event that may be beneficial to them
- Introducing people you know to people they need to meet
- Referring business to others that are not a good fit for what you offer?

- Being a consistent listener

Dale Carnegie said it best; *“You can make more friends in 3 weeks by listening to others than you can in 3 years than you can by expecting others to listen to you.”* Everything is about follow-up. Do the unexpected. Get feedback. Ask for advice on a plan you have or a better idea on how to do something. Effective connectors are honored when asked for their advice or expertise. It shows them you have confidence in their judgment. Show somebody your company's forecast or plan and ask for their thoughts. Maybe you can provide a trial period for products or service and follow-up in order to get their feedback.

Be a consistent initiator. Don't wait to be invited to something, take the lead. Include others and make them feel comfortable and important. **Everybody loves invitations and being somewhere with you may just be the door opener for somebody else's business.** Continue dialogues that are mutually beneficial over coffee, lunch or in the cafe at your local bookstore. That's another way to follow-up.

You must follow-up within 48 hours. I'm not suggesting that you have to make a decision or actually have an appointment on the calendar within 48 hours. You know what? People will easily forget you. When you follow-up quickly and efficiently, you become memorable. Being memorable is very important in business. Follow up quickly and consistently if you want to get the business that you're looking for. If you implement a solid follow-up plan, it's likely that you will stay in touch with customers, nurture leads, and set an example for others by your actions.

Following up demonstrates interest in others, commitment to your product or service and reliability. When you follow-up, others recognize you in a positive light. We all know individuals who always get asked to take charge, share their input or volunteer, we ask help from reliable, consistent individuals who get the job done. Do others ask you? If not: why not? You never know whom you will meet and the difference that encounter will have on their lives, and you never know who you will meet and the difference that person can make in your life. **It simply comes down to follow-up in your business, in your behavior and in your plan, and it is in your commitment to be of service to others.**

Following up is where the money is. Following up is critical to your success. What is the point of not following through and not following up unless you have every intention of not staying in touch with your potential leads? When you say you are going to do something, you need to do it. As I mentioned, you must honor your commitments. My suggestion would be that you have a great follow-up plan.

Strategies for “Being Memorable”

In this part I’m going to share many strategies on: “Be Memorable.” I’ve shared two sections so far. Part I focused on initiating conversations; Part II was all about follow through and follow-up. Get ready for specific strategies to “Be Memorable.” I love this particular phase of being a savvy networker! There are two parts:

1. “Be Memorable” in appearance and
2. “Be Memorable” in your behavior.

Now, I’m a silver-haired grandmother who always wears cowboy boots. When I say “always,” except for the beach, you will always find me in cowboy boots! It’s become my signature style. I can be in the mall and someone can be behind me and yell, “Hey, Bonnie, is that you?” And I turn around and I’m like, “Oh my gosh, I didn’t realize you were at the mall as well, how did you know it was me?” “I saw your cowboy boots.” My husband and I had an occasion once – we live in Atlanta – and were in Washington, D.C., and we were on the Metro System. There was a woman sitting opposite me and she kept looking at me and I looked back at her. While she looked familiar, I don’t live in D.C., so it would be odd for me to know somebody that might reside there. She finally leaned over and said, “Are you Bonnie?” And I said, “Yes, how did you know that?” She said, “Well, Bonnie, you have on your cowboy boots! I used to live in Atlanta and I attended one of your workshops years ago. I remember you talked about always wearing cowboy boots.”

Cowboy boots have become my signature style. It’s memorable. It creates conversation and curiosity. My boots are an obvious way to get noticed. I will tell you that being memorable with an unusual/memorable look can be a significant plus in the marketplace.

Let’s face it, the marketplace is crowded and everyone is scurrying for their share of business. When you’re memorable, particularly with your appearance, you stand out. I’ve been places where there’s a gal in my area that always wears hats, we have a friend that always wears an unusual tie. I happened to do a workshop one time and there was a woman there and I was talking about “Be Memorable,” and she decided to start wearing very unusual pins. I saw her not very long ago and I happened to comment on it, and I didn’t realize that that was something she was creating as a signature

When you are memorable, particularly with your appearance, you stand out!

style. I said, "Lisa, I love that pin!" She said, "Last year I heard you talk about being memorable, so I go out of my way to find unusual pins. When I wear one, it generally starts a conversation. How cool is that?"

I know someone who always wears black and gold. Would you believe it, everything she wears is in combination of black and gold - even in the summertime! Well, that may not be a style you'd like to replicate, but it sure is memorable! Next time you're in a room, maybe at a big networking event - a chamber of commerce for example, or any afterhours, look around the room. You'll be amazed. You'll notice red jackets – bright colors - immediately. Someone might be wearing a hat.

It's very easy to spot an individual who stands out in the crowd. Beige's and blacks, while they are basic in a woman's wardrobe, are not "Be Memorable," unless they stand out with a very colorful scarf or a very unusual shirt, or so on. Men are a little limited. I know men that always wear absolutely fabulous shoes or shirts that are different colors (forget white!) Maybe it's time to get away from the grey suit and the white shirt or the blue sport jacket and the striped shirt. Maybe men need to break away, like I said, maybe wear unusual ties or a tie tack – anything that is professional AND helps them stand out in the crowd. So "Be Memorable" by appearance is something is easy to do If you're not geared into that at this time, you might consider moving in that direction.

The second part of "Be Memorable", is behavior, and actually there are two parts to behavior. There's behavior that is positive and there is behavior that is negative. Obviously, you want to be remembered for the right reason. We know people who are always late, they're totally disorganized, they don't do what they say they're going to do and they're simply not reliable. I've been with people where we've gone out to eat and we've divided the check - down to the penny. I've been with individuals who've said, "I'll give you a call tomorrow because I have a lead for you," and I never hear from him or her. I know people that you don't want them to volunteer because you know they're never going to carry out what they say they're going to do. Being unreliable is not a good idea. Being remembered for the wrong reason is not a competitive advantage, if anything, it's a competitive disadvantage. Now let's focus on the opposite, which is "Be Memorable" for the right reason. Isn't it great to be someone that others can count on? Isn't it great that you're a person of your word? Isn't it nice when you go out to lunch with somebody and you say, "You know what, I'll pick up the tab and you can treat me next time," Isn't it great when you're always on time? Don't you hate when someone always makes you wait? Isn't it commendable when you're punctual and somebody can rely on that? Same behaviors are necessary when volunteering. You need to do what you say you're going to

do. We all know people that we just don't ask for favors or for any sort of input because we know we can't count on them.

Being reliable for the right reasons leaves positive, indelible imprints everywhere you go and in everything you do. Being remembered for the right reasons includes doing something out of the ordinary and displaying consistency and integrity regardless of the situation. It's easy to send a thank you via email, and I talked about that in follow-up. I actually use personalized stationery and handwrite my notes. I keep stationery in my car, I keep stamps in my car, and when I'm detained in a waiting room or somewhere I can sit and write, I do so, because it offers me another opportunity to be memorable. When somebody hears from you and it's unexpected, they're going to remember you and for the right reason. Sure, I know writing thank you notes takes time, of course it does, but it's memorable.

Be generous in paying compliments; everybody loves a compliment. Think about the last time somebody complimented you - they commented on your shined shoes, they commented on your unusual tie, they commented on your pin, or in my case, my cowboy boots. Isn't it great when somebody compliments you? You can do the same thing for others. It's a great conversation starter. You can go up to somebody you've never met and put out your hand and say, "I don't think we've met, my name is _____. I have to tell you I was attracted to that amazing jacket, and I have to ask you where did you buy it?" Or you could go up to somebody, even a guy, and say, "You know what, I love when somebody really dresses sharp like you, you look awesome!" It's so nice to extend compliments, people love to receive them and it makes you feel good to get them. It's another example as a way to be memorable.



Extend Compliments

When you notice somebody standing alone at an event, engage that person in a conversation. I mentioned this earlier about initiating conversations and it bears repeating. You are memorable when you lend a hand; you are memorable when you make somebody else more comfortable; you are memorable when you go out of your way to help somebody. All of these are ways that you can be memorable, or that your behavior is memorable. The bottom line is what do you do and what do you want others to remember about you? In fact, why show unless you want to be remembered? I mean, what's the point? If you're going to show up at any event, make a statement, be accessible, be approachable, be helpful, be an excellent listener, "Be Memorable."

Recapping – Being a Savvy Networker!

So, to recap, to be a savvy networker - first of all, you want to be a great conversation starter; you want to be great about following-up and following through and you want to be memorable. You want to leave positive, indelible impressions everywhere you go and in everything you do. It takes one slip up, one bad behavior to become known for something other than what is acceptable to you. In business, the more integrity you have, the more positive imprints you leave and the more likely you will be successful in your career.

Next Steps

You probably know the saying - "Knowledge is power". I don't happen to believe that knowledge is the key. The key to one's success is - "**Knowledge with action is power.**" You must take action on the knowledge you get in a way that works for you. It's the action that produces change. You have every opportunity to increase your knowledge. You have every opportunity to expand your resources. It really is up to you. What are you prepared to do to improve performance? What are you prepared to do to take action today? I suggest that you begin to write down your goals, write down some things that you are determined to do in order to improve your performance in the workplace. Write down a couple of seminars or a couple of books that you intend to read and make sure that they are on your action plan. You see, it's just a matter of increasing your productivity, your knowledge and your value. Then, when you enter a crowded and competitive marketplace, you will be armed with the resources you need to make a difference to the people you meet by representing yourself as the vendor of choice in your respective industry.

Choosing to Make a Difference

The last segment in Are You A Savvy Networker is choosing to: "Make a Difference." When you desire to make a difference, you must be clear about who you are, what you say and what you do. Increase your ability to make a difference by being prepared to listen and to serve others. When you make a difference, you are choosing to make every connection a positive experience. You can set a high standard on how to treat others by your own example. Making a difference shifts the traditional networking paradigm from "*What's in it for me to what's in it for them.*" Your genuine concern and support for others creates lasting relationships, which, over time, all increase your business.

Think of experiences you've had where others made a difference for you; they offered you help; perhaps they supported your initiative; they maybe went out of their way to get you something you needed. You can offer that same support to someone else and make a difference in their life. The choice is yours. For example, extend invitations to attend future events to colleagues and associates. Introduce people you meet to people they need to know. Introduce people you know to people they need to meet. Establish yourself as an individual eager and willing to help others. Go the extra mile to offer someone a resource.



Be a Resource

Every connection affords you the opportunity to make a difference in both your personal and professional life. Most individuals are more interested in making a sale before making a difference. You make a difference for others when you serve them first by putting them ahead of your own agenda. ***People will do business with people who bring them value.*** You never know whom you will meet and the impact you can make on their life. You never know who you will meet you and difference that encounter will make on your life. People are listening to what you say and watching what you do. Decide again to leave positive, indelible imprints everywhere you go and in everything you do. Know the difference you can make by being of service to those you meet along the way.

I'm sharing the following story because of the significant impact it had on me and on my decision to focus on whenever possible.

The story happened decades ago, and I chose to save it because of the compelling impact it had on me. I originally received it as an email and have shared it hundreds of times during workshops and keynotes. I think it really is one of the most impactful expressions of how we can so easily make a difference in on another's lives.

It's titled: "Do Unto Others." One stormy night many years ago, an elderly man and his wife entered the lobby of a small hotel in Philadelphia. Trying to get out of the rain, the couple approached the front desk hoping to get some shelter for the night. "*Could you please give us a room here?*" the husband asked the clerk. A friendly man with a winning smile, looked at the couple and explained that there were three conventions in town, "*All of our rooms are taken,*" the clerk said, "*But I can't send a nice a couple like you out into the rain at 1:00 in the morning. Would you perhaps be willing to sleep in my room? It's not exactly a suite, but it's good enough to make you folks comfortable for the night.*" When the couple declined, the young man pressed on, "Don't worry about me, I'll make out just fine," the clerk told them. "*I'm working the night shift, so I will have no need for the room.*" The couple agreed to stay.

As he paid his bill the following morning, the elderly man said to the clerk, "You're the kind of manager that should be the boss of the best hotel in the United States. Maybe someday I'll build one for you." The clerk looked at him and smiled. The three had a good laugh and the couple went on their way. As they drove off the elderly couple agreed that the clerk was indeed exceptional, as finding people who were both friendly and helpful isn't easy.

Two years passed, the clerk had almost forgotten the incident when he received a letter from the old man, and recalled that stormy night. Enclosed with a note was a round trip ticket to New York asking the young man to pay them a visit. The old man met the young clerk in New York and led him to the corner of Fifth Avenue and 34th Street. He then pointed to a great new building there, a palace of reddish stone with turrets and watchtowers thrusting up to the sky. "That," said the older man, "is the hotel I have just built for you to manage." "You must be joking," the young man said. "I can assure, I am not," said the older man, a slight smile playing around the sides of his mouth. You see, the older man's name was William Waldorf Astor, and the magnificent structure was the original Waldorf Astoria Hotel. The young man, who became its first manager, was George C. Bolt. This young clerk never saw the turn of events that would lead him to become the manager of one of the world's most glamorous hotels.



“Making a Difference”

The Bible says that we are not to turn our backs on those who are in need, for we might be entertaining angels. ***Life is more accurately measured by the lives you touch than the things you acquire.*** So you see, whether it's in personal or business life, making a difference is the key to success. I invite you to consider what are some things you're doing to make a difference in other people's lives? When might somebody choose to acknowledge you because of the difference that you've made? Just imagine the wonderful feeling of fulfillment you can experience knowing that your presence, your generosity, and kindness, made a difference in somebody else's life.

We are all about relationships. Business is all about relationships. Making a difference shifts the paradigm as I mentioned earlier from "What's in it for me to what's in it for them." Be concerned about others. Share generously. Do what you can to change the direction of someone's life because of the value you lead by the example you set. Make every connection count!

Astoria Photo: [Susan Law Cain / Shutterstock.com](https://www.shutterstock.com)

Call to Action!

Thank you for investing your valuable time and reading this e-book. Are you ready to take the next step in your business networking success? To create the success you deserve, here's what you can do: Contact Bonnie at Bootgirl@XperienceConnections.com and schedule your **FREE** (30 minute) Business Networking Breakthrough Session – so that you can:

- *Understand where and how you are currently networking*
- *Uncover hidden challenges that may be sabotaging your networking*
- *Leave the session renewed and inspired to turn your networking efforts into successful business building opportunities.*

Remember - Using “Quick Connection” techniques will build your business success!

Contact Details:

Bonnie Ross-Parker

Xperience Connections

Email: Bootgirl@XperienceConnections.com

Website: www.BonnieRossParker.com