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Don't let faulty networking short-circuit success

How you meet and greet new people shapes your personal brand and reputation long before your successes, community contributions and stories earn editorial consideration by the media.

Everyone you meet around town at networking functions, conferences and other venues is a potential colleague, co-collaborator or client. And everyone you meet has his/her own extended network of people who form an inner circle that could potentially invite you in. It is essential to put your best face forward when you meet new people. Lead with your eyes and ears to make a winning connection.

To get the inside scoop on winning ways to connect at networking events, I consulted with Zita Gustin. Gustin is the executive managing director of the Snohomish Chapter of the eWomenNetwork, which will meet for lunch March 2 at the Everett Holiday Inn. Gustin is a master of the art of networking and speaks often to professional groups and the media to help others improve their skills and results.

Gustin says — and we all know — that some people are skilled at making quality connections that result in authentic relationships built on trust, admiration and respect. When they need advice, information or referrals, they count on their own inner circle to tell them the truth and help them get what they need. Best of all, they are happy to return the favor. This translates to greater success with ease and speed. That counts for a lot in today's information-overloaded world in which time matters just as much as money.

“The best advice I can offer to improve networking skills is to become a connector,” Gustin said. “If you spend more time focused on how you can help others achieve their goals, you will find many unexpected gifts and rewards bestowed upon you.

“To become a connector, learn to listen more than you talk. To understand what other people need, look them directly in the eye and hear what they are saying. Stay focused and present while you are listening, and people will marvel at your conversation skills. All the while, gather information to help you help them. Be curious and ask smart and gently probing questions that will help you do just that.”

We've all been on the receiving end of networking efforts gone wrong. It is jarring to have someone collect business cards as if on a scavenger hunt to earn a prize. It is uncomfortable when someone is listening to you with one ear and watching the room around you to see where she can next pounce for a potential lead.

As Gustin often says, “Good word-of-mouth marketing spreads fast, and bad word-of-mouth spreads even faster.” How you engage with others at networking events reflects upon your personal brand and reputation, and it can factor into the stories the



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media prepares about you and your company.

Gustin emphasizes that networking is about building relationships. Never forget that, and remember that building takes time. Bulldozing takes moments and leaves a swath of destruction in its path.

“The next time you head out to network with others — including reporters and editors — be sure to have the goal in mind that you are there to build relationships that will blossom over time. Leave the bulldozer at home,” she says.

Whether meeting people for the first time or talking with a reporter for a story, consider Gustin’s sage advice:

- Always focus on the other person.
- Be interested and helpful.
- Stay focused and present.
- Listen carefully.
- Be curious.
- Be able to describe what you do and why it matters in a concise, compelling and memorable way.

Meet both Gustin and me at the first meeting of the eWomenNetwork for Snohomish County on March 2 at the Everett Holiday Inn from 11:45 a.m. to 1:45 p.m. There will be plenty of opportunities to practice your networking skills. And, as the luncheon speaker, I’ll share quick, local examples that demonstrate how the power of publicity can generate winning leads for your growing business. I’ll also share at least five free resources or tools to help you learn how to catapult your story from obscurity to the media spotlight in record time.

Register by visiting this link: <https://events.ewomennetwork.com/event/calendar.php?lid=47>. See you there and then.

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