

NETWORK DRIVE-BY

BY ANGEL TUCCY

It happened to me. I was standing in a small group at a networking event when suddenly, there was a business card being placed in my hand, and into the hands of those I was talking to by someone none of us knew. In a flash, this person appeared, placed his business card in stranger's hands, and disappeared. I was the victim of a "Drive-By". I'm sure you're familiar with the action. No notice, no introduction, just a business card flung into your hand by a speeding networker.

When I attended my first networking event, I had no clue how to conduct myself or what the protocol was for meeting the 50+ unfamiliar faces in the room. Where do I start? How do I connect with them all? After attending several events, I've discovered that I'm not there to meet everybody. I discovered that there is a right way and a wrong way to distribute my business card, introduce myself, and connect with the people I've met.

The Nametag

Here's what I've learned about introducing myself. Often, people use my nametag as a "pre" introduction. As they approach me, rather than look me in the eye, extend their hand and introduce their name, they avert their eyes to my nametag. They attempt to pronounce my business name and then ask me what I do. Hmm. Shouldn't we be introduced first?

The role of the nametag is to be a reminder to you if you've forgotten my name. But you must first learn my name. An introduction at a networking event is no different than at any other social gathering. The nametag is just a helpful reminder for you during the conversation. Do not start staring at my nametag until we've been formally introduced.

The Business Card

I love that everyone has an automated customer management database. It's a great way to stay connected with our customers, friends, and associates. However, it seems like some people are just in the business of collecting or passing out as many cards as they can. The point of exchanging business cards is to stay connected with someone you've just met. When there is a "mutual" benefit in continuing the conversation, then exchanging business cards makes sense. When you are actually interested in their services or you want to refer them to someone else, you can exchange contact information.

If I give you my business card, I am not inviting you to add me to your automated newsletter. Always, always, ask permission to add someone to your newsletter. It is just rude to expect them to "opt-out" of something they never opted into in the first place. If you aren't comfortable asking their permission, then you need to spend more time establishing the relationship. Courtesy and customer service go together.

The Referral

A room full of people at a networking event does not represent a room full of potential customers to whom you can sell your wares. It does represent a room full of ambassadors. We are all ambassadors for each other. If you take the time to have a real conversation you can develop a group of people that will brag about you to others. You can learn about someone else and brag about them. When we talk about ourselves, nobody really listens. If we can get others talking about us, it is more interesting and therefore, more valuable. You are one person representing your company at an event. When you establish connections with others, they will represent you, often times, even better than you can represent yourself. The point of coming together is to learn about other businesses and share that information. Don't talk about yourself, instead, brag on someone. Make introductions. Spread the news about others. When you make people your business, people will make your business.

My friends and I all recovered quickly from our "drive-by" attack. We collected the cards and left them on the table for the one in the crowd interested in collecting as many cards as he could. For those of you with a stack of unwanted business cards, I know a child that is trying to earn his way into the Guinness Book of World Records for the most collected business cards. Send them his way. He won't add you to his newsletter.

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