



Use your networks to create more business - but do your homework first

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Recruiters and other B2B salespeople are failing to use meaningful face-to-face interactions to build relationships with prospects, says business networking specialist Julia Palmer.

It's harder to stand out in a sales call or email than when you're face-to-face with someone, she says. "You can try calling people or you can try emailing people, but I guarantee if you go along [to a networking event] and have an intelligent conversation with a person, you are way more likely to be sitting down having an hour coffee with them that week than with any other form of communication.

"So get back to face-to-face."

Palmer, who is chief executive of the Business Networking Academy, told a Sales Effectiveness seminar in Sydney last week that 85 per cent of business people are more effective when they're having a face-to-face connection, whether it's a meeting or a function.

"And Harvard and MIT have consistently shown that your individual networks contribute to your organisation's productivity."

But she says people fall into one of three networking categories:

- **"too little"** - these are the people who "just show up" to networking events, "if they show up at all".
- **"too much"** - this category of people are the "serial card collectors", Palmer says.

She notes that some managers send their consultants to events with the goal of collecting a certain number of cards. "It's almost a KPI of networking; 'Go out there and gather some cards'. But how are you ever going to develop relationships if you're card collecting?"

"These people are like vacuum cleaners at a networking event. They are running around and will get anything that isn't pinned down to you. And that is all they're there for. They're running up and saying 'what do you do?'"

It's a mistake to train people to collect cards, she says. "The cards don't have a personality. The cards can't talk... We're so focused on passing the cards around that we're missing the connection.

"You build trust when you look someone in the eye. You are more memorable when you have a conversation others haven't had, so the whole 'what do you do?' thing - it doesn't work."

- **"just right"** - these people "connect at a real level".

"They actually invest in a [networking] strategy, they look at it for the long-term, and they keep investing in it.

"You wouldn't go to a presentation without a bit of preparation... So let's not rely on networking to be accidental. Let's make sure that we actually take this seriously."

Build connections at all levels

Organisations that rely on B2B sales should encourage networking and connections at all levels, Palmer says.

That means executive assistants should actively foster relationships with other EAs, and CEOs should be connected. The expectation of sales shouldn't fall solely on sales and business development people.

Palmer adds that recruiters should leverage their families, friends and communities to expand their connections and relationships.

"The test that I ask people is: 'Does your mother know what you do?' At a barbecue... is she going to be able to promote you?"

"Most people laugh, but can you imagine, if your own mother doesn't know what you do, how do the rest of your friends and family network - who are your biggest advocates - how are they promoting you?"

Start now

Palmer says, "I firmly believe it's too late to build a relationship when you need it most. But it's even harder to build a network when you need it most. These things take a long time and a really good investment.

"Networking takes work. It's not something that you just show up and do."

She urges recruiters to think about how others see them and who might potentially advocate them.

"Who are you visible to within their networks? Because when you get really good at this, it's not just your network you influence but their networks as well."

The next [Sales Effectiveness breakfast](#) takes place in Sydney on 18 June.

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