

TiPS Program Networking Concepts



The Network Champion's Professional Networking Introduction

Every day you have the opportunity to meet new people and introduce yourself in a wide variety of settings. Sometimes you will be introducing yourself directly to someone you view as a potential client and at other times you will be introducing yourself in a business networking environment. At times you will be in a one on one setting while at other times you will be in a group setting. This requires you to adjust your message to some degree to achieve your goal at the time. Before introducing yourself, you should definitely consider who you are speaking to, what your objectives are, and how your message will be perceived under the circumstances. Each of these factors will help you determine exactly what you want to say.

To maximize your opportunities you should approach each situation strategically. The first thing I want to make crystal clear is that you will need to perfect at least two different self introductions. For this discussion I would like to focus on two different situations and draw some important distinctions between them that will increase your effectiveness in both. One is when you are meeting a potential client/prospect for the first time and the other is when you are meeting a perspective networking contact. If your introduction sounds the same in both situations, you are severely limiting your success. The underlying principle is that the same exact words or intended message may create completely different perceptions depending on the situation.

If you are speaking to someone with the goal of turning them into a client, you should be prepared to deliver what we call a “Professional Introduction”. When you are speaking to someone who is a prospective networking contact you should be prepared to deliver your “Professional Networking Introduction”. Each type of introduction should deliver some of the same information, but the perception of your message needs to be very different to be effective. Unfortunately, most professionals regardless of the situation just instinctively introduce themselves by stating their name followed by their occupation and then give a short description regarding the business they are in or what they do in general terms. For the most part people in the same business tend to sound exactly the same, they usually don't provide a compelling message that is memorable and they almost never provide an impression that their business is really better, different or special. This same old bland introduction becomes even less effective when they are referral networking because they don't usually include statements expressing their interest in building a relationship based on giving and sharing referrals. This is also why most people refer to these boring introductions as an “Elevator Speech” and not as a Professional Introduction or a Professional Networking Introduction.

An elevator speech will actually put you on the elevator to nowhere. They are usually so generic that they won't distinguish you from your competition in a meaningful way, they are rarely memorable, and almost never inspire others to really want you to tell them more. Fortunately some of the people will be kind enough to ask a follow up question in an act of professional courtesy. Unfortunately, most of the time what is said next by most professionals does little to impress the other person any more than their introduction did. The reason why a vast majority of professionals do a poor job of introducing themselves is that they have never invested the time to craft a strategic message even for their basic professional introduction let alone made a conscious differentiation about how their message is perceived in different settings. One of the biggest problems is the lack of variation in their message based on the situation to accomplish their goal at the time. What makes matters worse is that most professionals over estimate their own level of perfection regarding their introduction skills.
Don't let this be you!

We all know the importance of making a good first impression. People begin to draw conclusions immediately. Their perceptions take shape based on how you are dressed, how you carry yourself, how you speak, and of course what you say. You may never get another chance to frame their perception of you as a professional, so make sure you get it right the first time. Introducing yourself with success is a skill which should be well thought out and practiced. Regardless of how you think your introductions currently measure up, now is a great time to review the message of each type of introduction you will deliver in terms of what perceptions they actually create and just how compelling they are. Your focus needs to be on delivering the right perception for the right situation.

You should set a goal to become an absolute master at professionally introducing yourself in all types of situations. The time and effort you invest in perfecting this skill will certainly have one of the biggest impacts on your overall level of success. You can have the best business and provide the best service but if it isn't perceived as such, you won't get the opportunity to prove it. To begin to maximize your opportunities you will need to create both a standard "**Professional Introduction**" that is specifically designed to impress a prospective client and a "**Professional Networking Introduction**" that is specifically designed for a variety of networking situations with the goal of impressing other like minded professionals who are interested in developing relationships that generate referrals. Just keep in mind that although both situations will focus on introducing your identity and professional brand in a compelling manner, they have very different goals.

To effectively deliver both, you should first analyze what you've been saying when introducing yourself to a potential client/prospect. The reason you should improve your Professional Introduction first is because many of the same elements are needed to craft an effective Professional Networking Introduction and once you have refined your standard Professional Introduction; it will be much easier to adjust your content and redirect your message for almost any networking situation. Start this improvement process by engineering one well crafted message specifically designed for your standard Professional Introduction that covers the most important attributes about you and your business. Understand that you are promoting more than just yourself and your business, you are promoting what you stand for and specific benefits your clients and customers experience. Your message should clearly express what sets you apart from the crowd and why this is important to your existing clients. The key is to write down exactly what you want to say and think about how it may be perceived by a prospective client. Determine if the perception of your message highlights the right attributes and emphasizes the most compelling aspects that are important to your clients. Refine it until you are positive that a prospective client's perception will inspire them to want to learn more.

Now let's focus on your Professional Networking Introduction. One of the biggest problems with most introductions in a networking setting is their lack of a strategic approach that is properly perceived when meeting a new professional. The proper approach will set the tone and direction of your discussion and enable you to begin to learn if the other person has the potential to become a Networking Connection or even a Trusted Referral Partner in time. The wrong approach will simply close the door with professionals who are serious about networking and they are truly the ones who could help you the most.

If you want achieve networking success don't be a "Netseller". When introducing yourself the first thing you must do to become a Network Champion is get rid of anything that remotely sounds like an elevator speech. You know, the 30 second speech that most people spit out that gives their name, rank and serial number to some degree just before they go into what sounds like a sales pitch aimed at you. This is what a typical "Netseller" sounds like. A "Netseller" goes around the room looking for their next customer and will pitch anyone who will listen. Usually the person in front of them is just waiting for their first opportunity to get away. These people are not networking, they are "Netselling".

“Netselling” is the worst and least effective method of growing a referral business.

It is also the most over used approach in a group setting. All it does is turn Network Champions off and drive them away. Netselling exposes the person as a “Taker” and not a “Giver”. The “Giver” is looking for a long term win-win networking relationships while the taker is looking to make an immediate customer out of you. They are not good networking partners and they will usually never provide you or anyone else with a referral. They typically have a limited number of networking connections and they rarely have anyone who could be considered a Trusted Networking Partner. They don’t seem to understand the value of or see the long term benefits in developing true networking connections and partners. They can’t see beyond the immediate sale to the hundreds and potentially thousands of client opportunities that may be opened to them by adopting **“The Network Champion’s Way”**.

Your goal is to be perceived as a Network Champion and to utilize your Professional Networking Introduction to establish a frame work to develop

Trusted Networking Partners. A Network Champion’s introduction is truly thought out to highlight what they stand for and to emphasis their brand as a professional. Yes, it includes their name, business and basic information about their services and the solutions they provide. What sets it apart from the tired old elevator speech is a focus on professionalism and networking. They only talk about products or a particular service in terms of why it makes them different, better and special to their existing clients. They are careful to avoid anything that could be perceived as a direct sales pitch. Their statements are purposely focused on being referral worthy because of their service quality and the value they provide their existing clients. The Network Champion’s Professional Networking Introduction includes describing their primary interest for introducing themselves as an opportunity to meet other like minded professionals interested in building trusted referral partnerships. Your overall approach and the perceived message of your Professional Networking Introduction should stress the exceptional value you provide your clients because of your superior service model and the value you provide to the referral worthy professionals in your network.

Your message should infer that to be a part of your trusted network, a professional must be equally committed to maintaining productive networking relationships based on trust, sharing client referrals, and making introductions to your other networking contacts, connections and trusted partners.

The Network Champion makes it clear that they are only looking for referral worthy professionals that can add value to their existing client base and who will add value through a mutually beneficial networking relationship. Obviously to accomplish all of this, you must go well beyond name, rank and serial number. You must even go beyond effectively describing the 2 or 3 most compelling talking points about your business that reinforces a referral worthy perception. You absolutely must express your mission as one focused on referral networking.

Realize you are in a networking setting and not making a full presentation about your business.

You will expand your talking points in full detail during your connection meetings. So you must be prepared to set yourself apart from the crowd of network pretenders in a short period of time. Design your Professional Networking Introduction to give enough information in 60 seconds or less to accentuate the most positive attributes about what makes you and your business better, different and special with a focus on why these attributes make you referral worthy. The biggest and the most important differentiation from a Network Pretender or a Netseller and the Network Champion is that the Network Champion’s Professional Introduction includes strategic statements that clearly express their networking purpose and some of their philosophies about networking. This vital part of a successful networking introduction is what the Network Pretenders, the Netsellers and even most of the other well intentioned professionals fail to include in their introduction or they do such a poor job articulating their networking desire, it is ineffective at helping them accomplish their goal.

To achieve “Success by Design” when crafting your Professional Networking Introduction, include a few key statements that express your networking philosophy and mission so you leave no doubt that you are not here to buy or sell, you’re here to network for referral partners.

The Network Champion makes 4 things perfectly clear in their Professional Networking Introduction to accomplish their goal.

- 1) They use networking as one of their tools to add value to their current client relationships by referring them to trusted professionals who will provide an exceptional service experience.
- 2) They are looking to expand their referral network by finding a few new professionals who are interested in establishing professional relationships based on trust and helping each other grow their businesses through giving.
- 3) Their main goal today is to find like minded professionals who are both referral worthy and who are truly interested in professional networking.
- 4) They want to schedule a follow up meeting (Network Connection Meeting) with those individuals who exhibit networking potential with the goal of gaining an in-depth understanding of their business, their service model, and their commitment to networking to determine if building a relationship will be mutually beneficial.

The network champion approach to their Professional Networking Introduction discussion works because motivated professionals who are really interested in growing their business through quality referrals will respond to your professional networking approach and be interested in what you have to say. You will appeal to them, because you are perceived as a giver and not just a taker or network pretender. They will be impressed because you have made it crystal clear that you are serious about working together to help them grow their business. If they aren’t interested in networking in a professional manner, you will be able to make that judgment without wasting any more of your time based on what they say and their reaction to your Professional Networking Introduction. More importantly, you will be able to quickly learn if you are interested in them. All of this can be accomplished in 3 to 5 minutes maximum from the time you said hello.

One of the main goals of a Network Champion utilizing a Professional Networking Introduction is because it is an effective tool to help them quickly evaluate the other professional. When this is accomplished, it is up to the Network Champion to determine if the other professional exhibits enough potential to be worthy of their time.

All you have to do after the introductions have been made and any follow up questions have been answered is ask yourself a few simple questions.

1) Did they articulate a compelling message about the quality and value they provide to their customers? Do you perceive them as referral worthy?

If they can’t do this for their own business, you shouldn’t think they will ever invest the time to become an effective advocate for your business. (Don’t waste your time)

If they didn’t provide you with a clear perception that they provide an exceptional client experience and that they deliver something that is better, different or special compared to their competitors, they probably don’t. This is a clear signal that you don’t want to refer them to anyone. (Move on to find someone better)

2) Did they promote themselves as a professional who is committed to networking?

If they didn’t say anything about the value of networking to grow their business, they probably don’t have a network of other professional they are successfully networking with, you shouldn’t think they will suddenly change now and will be committed to building one.

3) Did they show interest in the concept of building a relationship to share referrals based on trust.

If they didn't become all ears when you talked about networking or express a desire to build a networking relationship, this is a good sign they don't follow through on their networking opportunities.

4) Did they create an impression they are a giver and not just a taker?

If they didn't express any desire to share or add value to you, they probably only pursue the people they think can be turned into immediate customers.

5) Did they seem interested in expanding the conversation in the direction of professionally networking together?

If they didn't seem interested in expanding the networking discussion, don't assume they will want to do something they didn't even want to discuss.

Now just make a decision and take action. If they don't measure up to your standards, politely excuse yourself and move on. If they have impressed you with their potential to become a networking partner, then proactively follow up to schedule a Connection Meeting or you are the one being a network pretender.

As you perfect your own Professional Networking Introduction, consider how your introduction would be perceived by another Network Champion and what conclusions they would come to based on the 5 questions above.

The whole point of developing a Professional Networking Introduction is to make your networking efforts highly productive. The Network Champion's approach is engineered to clearly establish your intentions and to help you eliminate the network pretenders. It will establish you as a professional and not a Netseller. It will enable you to focus your networking follow up efforts on people who are serious about building relationships built on giving. Invest the time to engineer your Professional Networking Introduction and network with success.

Successfully yours,

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"Where Membership Means Referrals"