

Network Your Way Out of a Slump

Guest Author: Lovey St. Pellicer, Founder, Koffee Talk

Now that the holidays are over, and 2008 is behind us, reality has returned. It's a great time to reflect on the past, and to focus our attention on our intentions for 2009.

Any chance your resolution list included one the following?

- Generate new business
- Increase your income
- Secure a new employment opportunity
- Make new friends
- Build credibility among peers

If so, networking to meet the right people is going to be an essential part of achieving your goal.

Networking and connecting with people are essential, not only to our professional development, but also to the ongoing success of any business. We must continually ensure that we have a steady flow of new referrals. Connections generate unsolicited referrals or warm introductions, creating the opportunity to shorten the sales cycle and close sales, resulting in an increase in business.

I want to share about how networking works for me personally, but I first must begin my story with a confession - I lead a double life. I am the founder of Koffee Talk, but also maintain a full-time job working for Lightning Golf & Promotions as a commission-only sales person selling promotional incentives. My income from Lightning Golf is critical to myself and my husband, in order to maintaining our current lifestyle.

Unfortunately, I was not immune to the economic downturn of 2008. As we all know, the ripple effects have quickly spread into many industries, creating an epidemic crossing continents. During 2008, I lost two of my top seven accounts to takeovers, and I experienced a significant drop in customer spending.

All of these factors have had a direct affect on my income and my self esteem. As the situation worsened, I began to question my ability to generate a paycheck in my current job, and I secretly began to work on my resume.

It may sound crazy, but I truly enjoy selling promotional items. After some consideration, I realized that I was not quite ready to throw in the Lightning Golf towel. I turned to my business network, which I have been carefully cultivating for years, for advice, leads and ideas. Lucky for me, I am well connected and after a few weeks, my phone began to ring. As business began to pick up, I began to track where the surge in new business was coming from.

I found that 100% of my new business is from referrals directly tied to my networking efforts. These referrals became new customers which I never directly sought - representing accounts I would never have had the opportunity to penetrate if not for the relationships I have developed over the past 15 years.

As a result of my years of networking, making connections and building solid relationships, during the last 6 months of 2008, I either met or exceeded my monthly sales goals.

I believe that networking and connecting with new people on a regular basis will always be essential to my success. I did not go to high school in Baltimore; I am from St. Louis and moved here in 1993. I am not a super-star sales person. (I know this because I have friends who are -- they amaze me.) I just know a lot of the right people, who trust me and give me opportunities to earn their business.