

## How Can I Help?

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Once upon a time a business woman attended her first networking event. She was not sure what to expect. She had just started her business and things were going well, but she knew that she had to keep looking for business. So off she went to a breakfast meeting to hand out a few business cards and meet some people she could sell her products to.

After all, that is what networking is all about, right? Introducing yourself to prospective customers, leaving them with a business card and waiting for them to contact you and buy your product.

What the business woman in this story found out that morning was that networking is SO much more than that. After demonstrating her knowledge of her “elevator speech” to a few people, she met another business woman who didn’t just spout out her introduction but instead started to ask questions.

*“How long have you been in business? What do you like about being an entrepreneur?? What is your background? What is your biggest challenge? And, **how can I help** with that?”*

Her biggest challenge turned out to be paperwork. Business was going well; so well that the business owner could not keep up with all the administrative work that had to be done. It just so happened that the networker extraordinaire she connected with *could* help her out. She connected her with her contact at a local college who placed students in small businesses to support their administrative functions. This helps the business owner out while at the same time giving the student practical experience they need. It is a win win situation.

Right now you might be thinking, *“That’s nice. But what did the second business woman get out of it? Wasn’t she there to promote her business as well?”*

Of course she was there to promote her business however she was there for so much more. The second business woman was me.

I believe that networking is so much more than handing out a business card. I understand that by helping others I am building relationships as well as a reputation for being the kind of person people want to get to know. And once people get to know me the referrals, help, support and business flows.

It is that simple. It is time consuming though. It takes time to build relationships. It takes commitment and hard work. It also means you will have to focus on what you can do for others and not on what they can do for you. That will come.

In my opinion, the quality, depth and value of what we get out of networking relationships wholly depends on what we first put in. Others will reciprocate in kind based upon the way we treat them. When we work within the law of reciprocity, we concentrate on honing our relationship building skills. The payoff may not (and almost always *will* not) be immediate but it will be worthwhile.

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