



MONDAY MOTIVATOR

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WILL ROBERTSON / JAY McDOWELL

Will@PS-MCG.com Jay@PS-MCG.com

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NETWORK GROUPS

This past week I had the pleasure of attending a Saturday morning network event I had not even been aware of and of course, had not attended before. Both my partner Jay McDowell and I attended. It was held at a popular local restaurant in a meeting room setup for such events. It was an RSVP affair, so both Jay and I sent in our reservations ahead of time.



The fee for entry was only twenty dollars and included a complete breakfast served at our table from a choice of four entrees. The event included networking time, an MC and two speakers,

plus time for each of us to share a 30-second “commercial” with the entire group. Fifty business people were there in addition to me.

The first speaker covered some key points about networking in general. She made some very good points and gave me more than a few ideas on how to use my professional speaking experience in a new way to help generate new clients for our business coaching and consulting company.

The second speaker was our keynote presenter. He did a masterful job of sharing the benefits of scripting messages for any situation where persuasion is part of the message purpose. His points were well made and well-illustrated on a large wall mounted monitor that was easily visible to everyone in the room. His work was well known to me, but in this setting he delivered one of his best presentations I’ve seen in the past year. Everyone was educated, motivated and a little entertained. To drive his point home he mentioned a full-day workshop that many signed up for on the spot, including both me and my partner Jay.

As I sat there enjoying every moment of this event, while sipping a delicious cup of warm coffee, being repeatedly filled by an attentive server with an authentic smile, in a room full of other professionals, it struck me. There are a lot of networking groups in most large communities, and they are not all the same.

Locally we have well over thirty chambers of commerce. In addition, there are at least a dozen “professional” networking groups, some of which require membership in addition to lunch or dinner costs that vary, depending on the venue. If I had to place a numbered value on each one I’m familiar with, none would get a higher number than the one I had just experienced. This would include the mega-mixers that are held quarterly in the greater community, where our business is located. I’d like to share my views on why such groups range from just interesting gatherings all the way to marketing mandate..





To begin with, most networking group events are just that ... events. They are not usually well orchestrated on a professional level where each person who attends, feels totally engaged with many new faces that are invites of others who see a fit for a few new introductions. I can think of only one other group in my community that comes close and I'm a regular at their events, where excellent lunch menus and ample time for introductions are a big

part of the agenda. The group is been in existence for decades and has an excellent reputation for meeting the expectations of its members.

Next, most events will not allow you to speak beyond a half-minute commercial, unless you are a member of the group. The problem with this is that when membership is required it is mostly the members who keep showing up. Eventually you've spoken to everyone in the group. If new faces are not part of the experience then the value of your participation is diminished. As one example of this limitation both my partner Jay and I have offered our considerable expertise as speakers at chamber of commerce events. Most say we are not allowed unless we are members. They say this is to be fair to the members who paid to be members in the first place. Our advice would be to make sure the following requirements are being met.

1. Try to find a group in your community that is well known to the types of business professionals you like to hang out with; your "tribe" as it were. This should be a group where the attendees are not all from your own professional background. In this way you can both offer and receive offers of professional products or services that are mutually beneficial.
2. Note how often the group meets. Do they meet up every week, every other week or only once per month or even quarterly? This may be important to you from a scheduling perspective. Weekly meetings can be quite time consuming, and most professionals need to justify taking 2 to 3 hours for a lunch event in the middle of a work day.

3. Arrive prepared. Know something about the group and their organizers. If you know others who attend, see if you can meet them for personal introductions. Nothing is better than being introduced to someone known to an acquaintance of your own. It avoids the sometimes awkward ice breaking attempt, and usually includes a brief explanation of your work focus.
4. Ask twice as many questions as you provide statements. People want to be noticed, heard, and respected. Nothing is more attractive than a new acquaintance who is more interested than interesting. Always be the first to offer your business card. This will activate you getting one in return. Take a moment to look at the card instead of putting it away, then asking the person what s/he does.
5. Include a next step in your conversation. Keep your conversation brief out of respect for the fact that others are there to meet new faces as well as you. But when you do move on consider asking if it would be okay to make contact in the coming days. With approval for such a follow up you won't look desperate to meet again. Also, you can call or E Mail with an invite for a coffee shop or an office visit.
6. If you do opt for an office visit be the first to suggest that you come to the other person's office. After all, if you do get that approval you'll know a lot more about the environment as well as the professionalism of your new acquaintance. Do not show up with a sales package. You are there to learn about the other person, who they are, what they do and how they may want to exchange referrals.

In summary, and to quote our first speaker on the subject of networking, showing up to an event where you only know a few in attendance, gives you a wealth of new opportunities if you take the lead in introducing yourself. Remember that follow up is everything. Have fun and don't try to make it a notice-me-or-else-I'll-leave mission.

Will Robertson, Founder / CEO and Jay McDowell, President / MBA are doing business as Performance Strategies as of Jan. 1, 2017. Our offices are located at 1231 E. Dyer Road, Suite 215, Santa Ana, CA 92705. You can reach us at 562-577-7000. Our web site is www.PS-MCG.com Our E Mail addresses are: Will@PS-MCG.com and Jay@PS-MCG.com

Our consulting and coaching focus supports management, sales, customer service and operations. Included are sales and management assessment surveys as well as leadership, teambuilding, sales operations efficiency and online tracking projects. Our other team members bring additional disciplines as well. We will showcase them in future editions of this business journal. We are all committed to driving the results you want.



Will Robertson, Founder / CEO



Jay McDowell, President / MBA