

USE NETWORKING TO BOOST VISIBILITY

Like it or not, life is about relationships. Business works best when life is going well and vice versa.

It is next to impossible to live without having relationships with other people, and it's even harder to be in business without relationships. Those who are around me will hear me say, "You can never have too many friends." Now, not everyone needs to be your best friend, but the more people you know well enough to call by name — or at least remember their face in order to acknowledge them when you see them in your community — the better.

Networking events can work well, but many people are intimidated by them. You already have places where people can get to know you: family, friends, neighbors, church, little league, gym, stores, restaurants, civic activities, clubs, associations and social groups. Sadly, too often people we know aren't aware of all the services we provide. It won't work to barrage them with a speech or to list them all in a brochure; it's best to simply listen for opportunities in conversations to reinforce or tell them of a new service you offer.

One of the best compliments I ever had came a few years ago from my daughter when she was about 14 years old. We were going somewhere as a family, running a bit tight on time and needed to pick up something at Wal-Mart. While we pulled into the parking lot, my daughter said, "Dad, let Mom go in. You'll make a new friend and take

too long." She realized that I enjoy meeting new people everywhere I go.

Networking is the business version of making new and maintaining old friends. Friends should automatically be part of your networking, and some business networking connections may well become your friends. Networking is about more than just meeting people; it's about having people remember you. People like to talk about themselves, so give them the opportunity by asking open-ended questions that relate to what they've already been telling you. Find a reason to get back to them with information, an answer to a question, etc. And then be sure to follow through. Put people into your "drip irrigation" system of networking. Make notes on their business card about what they told you — family, hobbies, birthday, anniversary, interests, non-profits they're involved with, upcoming projects, etc. Enter the information into your contact management system or database, and set it up to remind you of reasons for you to contact them. Follow through on each reminder by calling them or sending a card, a hand-written note, copy of an article that mentions something about

their interests. With each reminder, open the person's contact file, read through your notes, add more if you can and set another reminder for 6 to 8 weeks out. Add these names to your mailing list for newsletters or holiday cards. These

reminders come up on my computer almost daily.

At the 2008 Remodeling Show in Baltimore I decided to attend mostly seminars about marketing. A common theme I heard is that we need to work at cultivating repeat work and referrals from our existing clients. I was reminded that, to be remembered, even by our existing clients, we need to do things differently than our competition.

If your circle of influence — people you know and socialize with — doesn't fit the demographics of your target audience, then you will need to find ways to rub shoulders with people who are your audience.

Most of the time networking won't provide leads tomorrow. It's a tool that will

bear fruit over time, but you never know when you'll make the right connection. **PR**

Dennis D. Gehman, CR, CLC, CKBR, GAC, CAPS is President of Gehman Custom Remodeling in Harleysville, Pa. Contact Dennis at dennis@gehmanremodeling.com.



By Dennis Gehman
Advisory Board
Columnist

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