

What's Your Chamber of Commerce Membership Strategy?

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As you may already know, joining a Chamber of Commerce is a wonderful way to meet new people, have interesting conversations, learn new things and grow your business. But just having a membership is rarely enough.

That's right. The real way to maximize your Chamber membership is to build - and sustain - solid relationships with other Chamber members. And not to oversimplify things, but there are three main ingredients you'll need to do that: time, effort and a good strategy - a good membership strategy, that is.

What's a Membership Strategy?

Oddly enough, you probably already have a membership strategy - whether you realize it or not. And as you will see, there's absolutely nothing inherently wrong or unkind or unethical or even unusual about having a membership strategy. Nope. There's nothing unauthentic or disingenuous about it because any time you're deciding whether to attend a meeting or function or introduce yourself, or not, you're implementing your membership strategy. So the real question isn't whether you have one or not - or even need one. The real question is how well is the one you've got working for you?

Too often we do things without thinking. Not that everything has to be planned out, mind you, but business development - which is why we join the Chamber in the first place - is too important to have happen by default. So take some time to consider what you're trying to accomplish and how best to optimize your efforts.

Optimizing your Membership Strategy

Now there are as many ways to do this as there are Chamber members, so it's important to come up with an approach that works best for you. Given that, here are some helpful hints to get you started:

- ⇒ **Become a familiar face.** A Chamber offers a wide array of programs and networking opportunities for different tastes and pleasures. Find the ones best suited for you and become a regular attendee. Look for the faces you find familiar and get to know the people behind them. Depth is better than breadth. And who knows,

you may even be asked to do a presentation for the group. Now wouldn't THAT be cool!

- **Sharpen your 30-second pitch.** If it doesn't sing for you, chances are that it probably doesn't sing for others, either. So work with it. Mold it. And don't be afraid to ask for feedback or change it as you learn more about yourself and the message you're trying to communicate. Be engaged and engaging and invite others to learn more about who you are, what you do and how they can help.
- **Be concrete.** When soliciting leads, be as specific as possible. Help people create a mental picture of who you'd like to meet and do business with. One way is to describe it as a person-in-a-situation - "people who love to read self-help books," as example. Another way is to describe a situation you're looking for - "associations or business groups looking for guest speakers." And don't say, "Anyone who'll hire me." Although it's easy to say, it doesn't offer much by the way of who should be referred to you. Here's an approach, when asked, just say, "Here's who I'm targeting THIS quarter..."
- **Make new friends.** Who looks interesting? Who seems intriguing? Challenge yourself to meet three-to-five new faces at every meeting. And within the week, follow-up with any of them you want to get to know a bit better. Get to know who they are in addition to what they do. Find out how you can help them. The major tenet of networking is "What goes around comes around."
- **Be a match-maker.** Do your best to introduce Chamber members to people in the rest of your network. Be a connector. Help 'expand the circle' of the contacts and resources you provide.
- **Keep the faith.** Remember that not everyone will be able to help you right away. But if you make a good impression - and honestly try to help them - they might just introduce you to someone they meet next week who could become your biggest client/customer ever.

Your membership in the Chamber is an investment. With time, effort a good membership strategy - and a little patience thrown in as well - you can easily recoup the value of that investment many times over. The choice is yours. The opportunity is waiting. Make the most of it.

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