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10 Tips for Building Business Relationships

No matter what industry you're in, building business relationships helps you increase sales, develop innovative ideas and discover new ways to grow your company. Here are 10 tips for building business relationships.

1. **Join the club.** Industry trade associations, niche organizations such as groups for minority or women business owners, groups your key clients belong to and your local chamber of commerce are all great places to make new contacts.

2. **Join the group.** Know what you are hoping to achieve from a particular organization. Do you want to meet prospective clients, potential partners, job candidates or suppliers? Setting goals will help you assess whether an organization is right for you.

3. **Be prepared.** In any situation where you're meeting new people, bring an open mind and a friendly attitude. Also bring business cards and be ready to describe what your business does in simple terms ("We help small businesses save money by preparing their taxes"). Greet everyone with a smile, eye contact and a handshake.

4. **Mingle.** Never spend all your time at an event talking to one person or group. Think of several ways to politely end a conversation and move on. (But first, get contact information from those you've been talking to so you can follow up later).

5. **Follow up.** When you meet someone you'd like to get to know, follow up. Use social networking tools to link up on LinkedIn, become friends on Facebook or follow each other on Twitter, and you'll also be exposed to the person's network of contacts.

6. **Take it offline.** Connecting on social media is a good start, but to truly foster a business relationship, you need to spend time face-to-face. Suggest getting together for coffee or a meal to share more about your businesses and how you might work together.

7. **Keep in touch.** Business relationships are like flowers—without nurturing, they wither and die. Make it a point to regularly connect with your key relationships, whether it's retweeting their tweets, mailing a card or meeting for lunch.

8. **Harness technology.** Contact management software can help you track information about your contacts so you don't have to remember birthdays, children's ages or hobbies. The software does it for you and sets up reminders for actions like emailing or sending birthday cards.

9. **Be patient.** Business relationships take time to pay off. It may take years of talking and planning with someone before you actually end up working together or seeing any results from one of their ideas, referrals or suggestions.

10. **Aim to give, not just get.** Of course, you want to benefit from business relationships—but that's more likely to happen if you have a generous attitude. Focus on how you can help your contacts, and you'll find that you get more than you give.

By Rieva Lesonsky

Rieva Lesonsky is founder CEO and President of GrowBiz Media, a content and consulting company that helps entrepreneurs start and grow their businesses. Before launching her business, she was Editorial Director of Entrepreneur *Magazine. Follow Rieva at Twitter.com/Rieva and visit SmallBizDaily.com to sign up for her free TrendCast reports.*

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