



# Get the Right Networking Mind-Set and Skill Set

by Dr. Ivan Misner

*Make more and better connections when you get your mind and skills in gear for networking.*

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**W**hen you're thinking about becoming a more skilled networker, you usually think about what you can *do* to network more effectively. This includes teaching others what kinds of referrals you're looking for, asking for referrals from your clients, and using incentives for those referring you. These are all components of your skill set.

And while it's important to know the right things to do while networking, it's equally important to start *thinking* the right way to make your networking efforts as successful and dynamic as they can be. This involves altering your mind-set. Let's take an up-close look at some elements you'll want to include in your mind-set to ensure networking success:

## **1. The law of reciprocity—or “Givers Gain” approach.**

The law of reciprocity sets in motion in-kind responses of individuals based on the actions of others. I like to call this the “Givers Gain” approach. You shouldn't approach networking thinking, *I did this for you, now what are you going to do for me?* Rather, you should remember the old adage “Give and you shall receive.”

The law of reciprocity takes the focus off of what you stand to gain from the networking relationship, and in doing so, creates bonds based on trust and friendship. Put it to the test. You'll be amazed by the outcome.

## **2. Diversity in networking.**

Look for groups that don't target people just like you. In this way, you'll broaden the net you seek to cast for referrals. There are many great networking organizations out there. If you stay only in groups that focus on your profession, you lose the breadth you need to develop a wide-reaching network.

## **3. Farming mentality.**

For networking to yield extraordinary success, your mentality must be that



of a farmer. He prepares the soil for months before ever planting the seeds. He tends the seedlings with care, feeding and watering them regularly, putting up a scarecrow to keep pesky birds away. It's a long, drawn-out process to go from seeding a field to harvesting the crops. There's no quick return.

Approaching networking with a mentality that focuses on the process of cultivating referrals will create the results you desire. Too many times I see professionals who are trying to grow their networks ask all the contacts they make at a mixer to visit their referral group, or keep them in mind for referrals as they give each new contact two or three of their business cards. This is way too soon. Think about that farmer diligently tending the seeds he has sown, and spend more time strengthening your friendships with those whom you wish to have as part of your networking circle.

Now that you have the basics for thinking about networking down pat, let's examine a few of the things you can do to develop a strong word-of-mouth-based business:

### **1. Activate the VCP process.**

VCP stands for visibility, credibility and profitability. What you need to do in order to be visible, credible, and profitable takes a certain skill set. Things like participating in monthly mixers hosted by your local chamber of commerce, writing a regular column in your local newspaper, or sponsoring the Little League team are things that make you visible. (See my article "Build Relationships That Last" at [www.entrepreneur.com](http://www.entrepreneur.com) to learn more about the VCP process.)

As you become more and more visible in your business community, you'll develop credibility. People will recognize that you're here for the long haul, and you'll begin to receive quality referrals. So look for opportunities to make yourself more visible. Think out of the box—be creative!

### **2. Sharp-shoot, don't shotgun.**

When talking about their businesses, many entrepreneurs try to get everything they do into a 30-second pitch—and potential referral sources miss most of it. They tune out after the first few items on the list.

Instead, you should focus on your top two or three areas of expertise.



Keep in mind that you're not marketing to your referral sources. In effect, you're training a sales force. Your networking team is there to keep an eye out for potential clients. If you communicate exactly what type of client you're looking for, better and more qualified referrals will result.

This skill set is especially productive when you're meeting weekly with a strong-contact network. The difference between trying to say it all and focusing on one aspect of your business each week is huge.

### **3. Hold one-to-ones.**

Conducting a one-to-one is almost like doing an interview, except that you both get to ask questions. The idea is to share something in each category you discuss with your referral source. I once had the chance to see how this literally transformed a networking relationship between two businessmen who'd been in the same networking group for quite some time but hadn't really made a deep connection.


The two begrudgingly took my recommendation to do a GAINS exchange—to talk about their goals, achievements, interests, networks and successes—and found that they had quite a few things in common. They both coached their young daughters' soccer teams, they both collected sports teams' hats, and their college degrees were in the same field. These two seemingly disinterested people became very close and developed the type of networking relationship that most only dream about.

See how networking is as much a mindset as it is a skill set? Clearly, there are many things to do that will make your networking attempts successful, but there are also a good many things to be that are equally important to this art.

### **QUESTIONS:**

#### **Can you tell us when you recognized the significance of Givers Gain?**

The light bulb went on for me when I was working my first job out of college. It was my first day on the job. And the position I was filling was brand new. To make things worse, the boss wasn't there. The HR consultant walked in and said, "Here's your desk; there's the phone—dial 9 to get out; the little boy's room is down the hall; and, your boss won't be back for three days. Good luck." Then she left.

I sat there having no idea what to do, so I decided I would meet all of the managers in this company. Not knowing what my job was, I went around from department to department, introduced myself and asked, 

“How can I help you? What can I do to help you achieve your goals and your objectives here with the organization?”

I was shocked at the response. First of all, they'd never had anyone come to them and ask how they could help. They really took it to heart, and many of them gave me ideas. When my boss came back, I gave him the results of all the conversations that I had. He was incredibly impressed, and it gave us a leg-up on turning that company around.

Instead of going in and telling them what *my* job was and what I was supposed to do, I asked how I could help *them*. I developed friendships very quickly and got right on the ball as to how to solve the problems.

**So instead of focusing on “What’s in it for me” it’s about “How can I help you?”**

Yes. “How can I help you?” is a great opening for anyone who really believes in the law of reciprocity—and there are only a handful of people whom I’ve ever met who really practice that well. I always know that they are a believer in that philosophy when I hear them use that phrase: “How can I help you?”

**How can a business person add diversity to their networking?**

Surround yourself with people who don't look like you, don't sound like you, don't talk like you, don't have the same educational background as you, and don't have the same experiences as you. Connect with people who are substantially different than you. The value in this is that you meet people who then become connectors who connect you to clusters of peoples you wouldn't normally have contacts with.

**You're talking about having diversity in your networking, but you also talk about maintaining contact spheres with individuals in similar professions. So, which is it?**

It really is not an either/or but a both/and situation. You want to have relationships with professions that are synergistic to yours. The problem is that if you do that exclusively, you've missed a huge opportunity to meet people who will be connectors to those diverse groups outside your profession.

On the other hand, if you are so focused on diversity that you've not created any relationships that are synergistic, you are missing the opportunity to get those kinds of referrals from the symbiotic professions.

**You talk about the process of networking being like farming. But**



**farming takes a long time. Are there strategies that one can employ, simultaneously, that have a way of speeding up the process of business networking?**

A good friend of mine, Dr. Emory Cowan, tells a story in *Masters of Networking* about his early days, years ago when he was in college and had just moved out from his family home. He was in Atlanta, and his parents had this recipe for peach wine that he really loved. One day he was driving down the highway and saw this vendor with bushels of peaches and decided he wanted to make some of this peach wine. So he bought a bushel of peaches, went to his parents', and got the paraphernalia to make it.

He mixed up the yeast, peaches, and the rest of ingredients, and put it down in his basement. He checked it regularly for days to see how it was coming, but it was going slowly. He got impatient and wanted to speed it along. So he put some more yeast in to speed it along. After he did that, he went back the very next day to see if it made a difference. He tasted it and found it was the absolute best batch of *peach vinegar* he ever made. And he said, "Ivan, sometimes there are things in life that you can't push. You can't make some things go faster. Instead they go bad."

Networking is like that. While there are things you can do to make it go a little faster, it's still all about relationships and building trust. If you push it too fast, you end up with networking vinegar instead of a networking referral relationship.



*Called the father of modern networking by CNN, Dr. Ivan Misner is a New York Times bestselling author. He is the Founder and Chairman of BNI ([www.bni.com](http://www.bni.com)), the world's largest business networking organization. His latest book, *Truth or Delusion* can be viewed at [www.TruthorDelusion.com](http://www.TruthorDelusion.com). Dr. Misner is also the Sr. Partner for the Referral Institute, an international referral training company ([www.referralinstitute.com](http://www.referralinstitute.com)).*