

Networking, *Like Life*, is a Process not an Event™

By Dan Williams

Author, "Tales From The Networking Community"

Introduction

When an individual is seeking to meet professional goals, one large question always looms: Is it *who* or *what* one knows that makes the difference? The Networking Community (TNC) believes it is both. While having a powerful network of contacts is critical to succeeding professionally today, knowing how to leverage that network efficiently and effectively is equally critical.

Currently in America, large numbers of professionals are interested in networking for a variety of reasons. First, the days of spending all or even most of one's entire career with a single employer are over for most of us. Operating as a job-market free agent, as many individuals now do, requires strong networking skills. Second, professionals today possess a keen desire to "make a difference" through their work. This form of altruism makes networking a way of life as individuals continually look to add meaning to their lives not only through their work, but also in the ways they spend their non-working hours. Third, layoffs have become one of the harsh realities of American business over the last few decades. Even for those who are currently employed, layoffs are often a looming reality. Whether at work or out of work, we need to network.

Networking, *like life*, is a process not an event. A learned skill, true networking represents the summit of marketing know-how, whether one is marketing products or services, or even oneself as a prospective employee or business partner. By learning and utilizing key principles, individuals can systematically manage network contacts from the point of simple awareness, through a series of measurable milestones, to the achievement of an identified goal. These networking principles are adaptable to virtually any set of circumstances, making them beneficial to the pursuit of almost any professional goal.

Background

As with marketing and sales, the consummation of any networking effort is the sale or close. A clerk in a candy store seeks to trade the sweets on his shelves for bills in his till. A novelist wants to see her work being sold in bookstores, a hip-hop artist to hear his songs on the radio. A job seeker is working toward the signed offer letter, and a real estate agent toward the signing of documents at the title company's

conference room. A college recruiter works to get students in the classroom, and a fundraising executive to get contributions in the bank.

Proven principles from the world of professional sales and marketing can be applied to networking in as much as networking represents a consummate marketing effort. As with marketing, the desired networking outcome can be identified, pursued and achieved. Perhaps the simplest form of marketing is the young child who, with a simple sign and a table, makes fresh lemonade available to neighbors as they walk by on a warm afternoon. The child cannot force results but, rather, she will accrue them over time.

By keeping the stand open and the lemonade cold, results come with persistence and focus. Further, as the product or service being marketed becomes more sophisticated, the means of marketing must adapt. Networking is, in our view, the ultimate form of marketing.

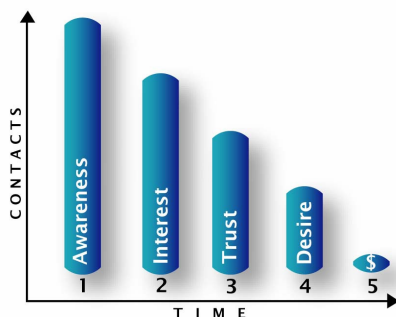
Most formalized sales training from the last several decades can be distilled into a fairly simple, linear process that moves prospects (networking contacts) from when they first become aware of what is being offered to when they “sign on the line” to close of the deal. The keys lie in managing the process in a disciplined, measurable manner, and in understanding how to set accurate expectations so as to clearly gauge progress.

Applying the TNC Methodology

Five Steps

The Networking Community’s *Five Steps to Networking Success* methodology offers a simple process for developing and executing a networking plan. Based on proven sales and prospect management principles, this highly adaptable system can be used in essentially any set of circumstances to achieve networking success.

The Five Steps to Your Success



Preparation involves developing a prospect list, based on the assumption of a one-percent success rate. That is, for every 100 initial prospects, you should expect to achieve your ultimate goal with one. While the numbers may seem a bit daunting at first, consider that most direct mail sales campaigns, where the prospects are scientifically selected and the offer is very

carefully and creatively presented (often at a considerable cost per unit), the response rates tend to fall between 0.5-2.0 percent. So while conservative, our one-percent success rate represents a realistic starting point. And given the high-value nature of networking results, the impact of that one-percent return can be very powerful.

Your initial objective is to make these 100 prospects aware of you and/or what you are offering.

How prospects are made aware differs with the particular networking circumstances. For someone seeking a new job, sending 100 resumes by e-mail can be completed in a fairly short time; making 100 government procurement specialists aware of a new technology will require much more time and very different tactics. Time is a critical consideration when setting expectations for one's networking, as suggested by the *Five Steps* chart. Depending on particular goals and what is required to reach them, the time needed will vary. But regardless of specific goals, over time the number of prospects will decrease as the prospective value of each remaining prospect increases.

A successful approach to initial prospecting should lead to roughly one-fourth of prospects moving from the *Awareness* step to the *Interest* step. This means 25 of the initial list of 100 will have become curious about the offer presented. If the number is much lower than this, the initial approach should be analyzed and adjusted. If it is much higher, later steps are likely to yield lower-than-expected results. If the result is in the 25 percent range, the next objective is to get prospects to turn a corner and begin to *Trust* you.

Moving from *Interest* to *Trust* generally requires a more detailed exchange of information than can be accomplished in the prospecting process. But the success rate moves up slightly to 40 percent. That is, of those 25 prospects that showed *Interest*, 10 are likely to move to the *Trust* step. Again, a significantly lower yield will call for approach adjustments. Results significantly higher will likely self-adjust later in the process.

With an established level of *Trust* come opportunities for more interaction and information exchange. The objective now is to leverage that *Trust* to compel a decision, or establish a *Desire*, to continue moving toward your ultimate goal. Generally, two out of ten prospects will move from *Trust* to *Desire*. And half of those, properly addressed, one will reach the final step, the *Close*.

These *Five Steps to Networking Success* show how a hypothetical list of 100 prospects can be managed to where one becomes a closed deal through a process that

moves from an initial *Awareness* step through *Interest*, *Trust*, and *Desire*, to the final *Close*. It is important to note that TNC did not invent these steps or the related success percentages. Rather, these general principles were derived from a vast body of sales education materials, and through more than two decades of actual sales success on the part of the author. TNC's value proposition involves making these proven principles available in a format that is adaptable to a wide variety of business and professional scenarios. TNC also offers a number of online, social, and other resources that enable individuals to put these principles into practice.


Before attempting to execute the *Five Steps*, however, one should also examine another dimension of the TNC methodology, that which involves understanding the three types, or profiles, of networking prospects.

Three Profiles

While networking prospects move through the same five steps to success, not all prospects are created equal. That is, different types of prospects will ultimately hold different types of value for the networker. TNC has identified three broad prospect profiles: *Darlings*, *Dependables*, and *Duds*.

Darlings represent the networker's sweet spot, the prospects that will ultimately deliver high **quantitative and qualitative value** once closed. *Darlings* generate both strong revenue and strong perceptions. The revenue aspect refers to whatever

The Three Networking Profiles

	High	Sweet Spot 20%	Darling
	Medium	Bread and Butter 70 %	Dependable
	Low	Loss Leader 10%	Dud

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“currency” the networker seeks to gain, such as actual cash revenue, or a strong offer letter for the job seeker, etc.; the perceptions involve more

subjective measures, such as the value of a networker's being associated with the prospect. For example, consider the old adage, “No one ever got fired for choosing IBM.” The subjective measure inherent in that statement is that an individual is in solid standing if she or he is associated with a recognized leader. Add to this the quantitative aspect, and *Darlings* are clearly the contacts that will make your month or even year when closed, but certainly keep you up at night if lost. Hence one out of five prospects should always be *Darlings*. To have many more will tend to minimize other types of value to be gained from other types of prospects. To have fewer can

diminish the positive financial and perceptual aspects that come from being associated with a leader.

The second networking profile is the *Dependable* prospect. Normally accounting for about 70 percent of all prospect lists, *Dependables* carry a **sustaining value**. In a sales environment, these are the customers with continuing needs who keep the sales team busy and the company profitable. While they don't have the star appeal of *Darlings*, they represent the heart of any networking endeavor as they allow it to continue comfortably.

The other 10 percent of the prospect list, the *Duds*, deliver the same positive associations as *Darlings* do, but do not generate much revenue. *Duds* are great to have on one's client roster for their marquee value, but to carry more than 10 percent becomes risky in terms of the need for revenue. *Duds* may also address an altruistic or philanthropic desire on the part of the networker, as is often the case with attorneys and their *pro bono* work. It could be that *Duds* make the prospect list simply because of an area of geographic or cultural interest. A consultant may seek clients in a city where she would like to eventually retire or an accountant may pursue clients that are involved in the performing arts because of his love for opera or dance. Whatever the reason and despite the name, *Duds* play an important role in everyone's networking.

So networking is not just about starting with the right number of prospects to achieve desired goals, but it also involves having the right mix of prospect profiles to ensure balanced results.

Conclusion

TNC subscribes to the Keep it Simple System (KISS) of networking. Our principles ensure that an adequate number of prospects are pursued to reach the desired result, and that those prospects will simultaneously achieve balance in terms of perception, quantitative success, and investment perspective. While the nomenclature is our own, the categories (Steps and Profiles) reflect time-proven sales and marketing principles. The percentages cited here should not so much be pursued, as they should be used as guidelines. Any significant variation from these percentages provides an opportunity for the networker to re-check her/his direction to ensure the approach being taken is as effective as it can be.

The networker should always remember that networking, *like life*, is a process, not an event. As such, it will have highs and lows, wins and losses, good times and bad times. Following a simple, proven process to successful networking allows the



networker to enjoy navigating the temporary ebbs and flows of success, knowing that the desired results are simply five steps away.

Biography

Dan Williams is the founder of The Networking Community[™] (www.TheNetworkingCommunity.com), a resource center for helping individuals and organizations maximize the value of their business networks and networking.

Williams's success as a technology and telecommunications sales executive began in the late-1970s and grew dramatically until the bust of early 2000. Williams developed business for such companies as, Tymnet, British Telecom, Primus Telecom, and more. When the tech bubble burst, like many, he went from being worth millions on paper to being unemployed and without a viable network overnight.

During a three-year stint as founder of a micro-enterprise in the mid-1980s, Williams had developed a powerfully simple system for tracking sales and marketing initiatives. While he successfully used this system in business during the 1990s, Williams discovered its true worth when he applied it to his own networking efforts after the economic downturn began. He soon realized a need for a solid networking methodology in the marketplace—one that would enable virtually anyone to network more effectively.

In founding The Networking Community, Williams has made his networking know-how available to all; through his book, *Tales From The Networking Community*, white papers, seminars and speaking engagements.

Williams can be reached at dwilliams@TheNetworkingCommunity.com