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10 Counter-Intuitive Tips For “Working a Room”

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Part of an effective marketing plan for financial planners is meeting new, quality prospects and referral sources. The more you meet, the more you are likely to close. So, it makes sense that one of the most effective techniques is meeting people in groups such as seminars, parties or trade association gatherings. But, some financial planners stay away from crowds. They feel too shy or awkward to mingle with strangers. The solution to learning how to work a room is to challenge your pre-conceived notions. When you do, you'll see that working a room is not only effective, but actually enjoyable. Following are 10 counter-intuitive strategies that will maximize your marketing success:

1. Don't try to be charming. The reason people feel awkward working a room is they have a misunderstanding of the strategy for working a room. Conventional wisdom would suggest that working a room is a social process where people need to demonstrate their charm. This notion of working a room as a display of charm is a myth. Effectively working a room does not require that you tell funny jokes or impress your targets with your charisma. The smart strategy for working a room is to think of it as research - a task with which financial planners already feel comfortable. Your job is to meet people and ask questions. Be interested in the people you meet. The focus should be on learning about the people you meet and the organizations they support - not strutting your stuff.

2. Go to poorly attended programs. You probably think it's good to go to crowded events. Realistically, you can only have quality conversations with a handful of people. Large crowds offer a

false promise of increased introductions. A large crowd can feel overwhelming and make you more shy. A sparse attendance can be more relaxed and facilitates your meeting the people who have come.

3. Pick programs that don't interest you. Programs that interest you may not be the programs that interest your targets. As you consider opportunities for working a room, pick programs that will be interesting to the people you want to meet. That will increase the likelihood that the room will be filled with quality targets.

4. Avoid your friends. One of the biggest mistakes people make when working a room is they go with their friends and inevitably stay with them throughout the evening. Your goal is to meet new people. So, don't invite your friends to join you or, if you do, make a pact not to stay together when you arrive.

5. Don't be fashionable. People think it's fashionable to arrive late. The problem is it's very difficult to break into established cliques already engaged in conversation. If you arrive early, you will easily be able to visit with others in the room. In fact, it is almost impossible not to.

6. Pick the longest drink line. Usually, you want to get a drink as soon as possible. However, when you're working a room, a long drink line gives you the ability to talk with the person in front of you and in back of you. The longer the line, the more time you have to get acquainted.

7. Don't tell people what you do. Conventional sales wisdom is to come up with some catchy description of your

service. The problem is that a catchy comment may position you incorrectly for that target. The better technique is to spend your time finding out what other people do. There will be plenty of time to talk about who you are after you qualify the person you're talking to. The more you learn about the people you meet, the more effective you will be at customizing your explanation of your services.

8. Don't give out your card. Old school sales techniques stress handing out your card. Unfortunately, handing out your card does not give you control of the follow-up. Your goal is to always get their card. That way, you are in a better position to stay in touch and build a relationship over time. By not giving out your card, you also avoid being bothered by people who you don't want to hear from in the future.

9. Get the cards of non-prospects. If you find yourself talking with someone who is not a good prospect, the best way to end the conversation is to ask for their card. When you do, you can comfortably excuse yourself and move on to more fertile opportunities.

10. Don't be a leader. Most people like to lead the charge to exit an event to avoid the exiting crowd. But, by lingering, you'll have more opportunities to meet those who have remained. Often they are the officers of an organization or the people in charge of the event and they may be some of your best contacts.

By following these counter-intuitive techniques, you can expect to build your financial planning practice with comfort and ease. You won't feel pressured to be charismatic. You won't feel pressured to sell your services on the spot. You'll meet more people, and you'll learn more about them. The information you obtain will make it easier to connect, easier to follow up and easier to close.

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