

## **Building a Network**

No matter how good you get in your chosen profession, no matter how well you master your selling skills and techniques, you cannot do it all on your own. Somewhere along the line you will need a friend, a contact, an introduction, someone to perhaps urge you on, or just to have an understanding heart to listen to you. These are the primary reasons -- although not the only ones -- why you need to build a network.

Many people think networks are only for high-level business professionals who use them to arrange special golf outings, provide front row tickets to sporting or cultural events, or to make special introductions. I hope you're not one of those people who believe that. The fact is that most people already have networks, but they just don't keep very good track of them or, even if they do, they don't use them as well as they could.

A network is simply a group of people helping each other get to where each wants to go as quickly, as easily, and as efficiently as possible. There are networks involving soccer moms, car pool groups, church organizations, social clubs, and community service groups. The most successful people in life and in business keep track of the people they meet through their various day-to-day activities and build their own custom networks to take full advantage of these networks.

For those of us in selling careers like real estate, a network is a powerful way to get to qualified prospects in the least amount of time and with the least amount of difficulty. Beware not to fall into the trap and think of networking in terms of just receiving something from others: leads, prospects, customers, guidance, hints, techniques, or moral support. Start your network by first considering the needs of others. Always remember this: success is determined primarily by the service you provide to others, not by what others do to further your goals. Take some time to carefully examine what you have to offer someone in your network. What capabilities, skills, information, talents, connections, and words of wisdom can you provide that might build someone else's career or further their goals? Almost everything you have is useful to someone else.

For example, the fact that you're on a first-name basis with the owner of the local service station, flower shop, or antique mall may be a valuable asset at some point to someone else in your network. Just like the links in a chain, you want to have a good, solid relationship with everyone in your network. A network is no good, of course, unless you work it consistently. Treat your network as you would an expensive, finely-crafted instrument and it will provide you with enjoyment, satisfaction, and profit beyond your wildest dreams. Here are six ideas for maintaining a strong, productive network:

### **1. Stay in touch.**

This one is pretty obvious, but it's also where many average "networkers" tend to fall down on the job. When an interesting bit of information comes your way, don't just evaluate it for yourself; pass it along to others who may also benefit from it. Other ways to keep in touch include birthdays, business or personal anniversaries. Dropping a card in the mail, sending a message via e-mail, or making a quick call is easy compared with how much harder you'd have to work if you didn't have this person's knowledge and resources to draw from. Keep an eye out for others in the news. Send them the clipping or at least recognize that you saw them. Making others feel good always strengthens your relationship. Go out of your way to share a meal with the key players in your network. These contacts don't need to be lengthy or take on the appearance of an obligation; in fact, spontaneity often makes the contact even more enjoyable. The point is, above all else, to make the contact