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Cultivate and Build New Relationships Through Networking

In addition to being considered the month of love, February is International Networking Month. In today's world, developing new relationships with people is truly important. Our social and professional interactions contribute to our overall health and mental well-being. Many people work remotely or live far away from their friends and family and often engage with others online rather than in person. This can make it hard to make new friends or find colleagues with common interests. We need to make the time and put in some effort, and that is where networking comes in.

What Is Networking?

Networking involves attending in-person and online events to find people who can offer insights, opportunities, guidance, and support for business or personal endeavors. Whether you want to find people who share your hobbies, a lunch date, a travel companion, or a professional who understands your specific challenges at work, your networking community can add value to your life.

Networking can be a strategic business activity or a social gathering. You can plan your own event or attend someone else's based on a personal or professional goal. Who do you want to meet and why? From LinkedIn business communities to Meetup.com, networking sites have many ways to help you find "your people" and offer opportunities to meet virtually or face-to-face.

When Do You Network?

Networking helps you expand your circle of friends or peers. You might feel lonely, want to learn something new, need a break from your routine, or simply want to be in a room with like-minded people. Search for specific events and activities that speak to you and meet your criteria for locations and times.

Check the profiles of online participants and comments about the group to determine if it interests you. If you cannot find exactly what you are looking for, create a group describing the types of people you want to meet and the activities or interests you want to explore. Then set up a time and place to see if other people in your area are willing to meet.

Online networking sites introduce you to many communities and individuals you can build relationships with over time. You can control the level of interaction you are looking for, whether it is to attend a casual cocktail hour with 50 people or schedule a meeting with one individual for coffee.

What qualities are you looking for in the people you will meet? How far do you want to travel to meet them? What interests do you want to share? Get started and work to establish connections that enhance your quality of life. You may find that you develop many lasting friendships or relationships with referral sources.

Networking Is a Worthwhile Endeavor

It takes time to find people who have the qualities you enjoy, whether in personal or business relationships. Get comfortable with introducing yourself to others. If you are a bit introverted, start with smaller networking groups, bring a friend, and spend more time listening before jumping in. Seasoned group members are often happy to introduce themselves and help new people feel comfortable.

You may have to try multiple networking events before finding the right fit. Once you do, commit to this social exercise. Building valuable relationships requires gravitating to people you can appreciate for their personality, skills, or knowledge.

In a world where family members live in different states and most interactions are virtual or remote, we need to discover new ways to meet people and connect on a deeper level. A sense of community brings people together. Networking offers an opportunity to give and receive love and support in a variety of ways. Give networking a try!