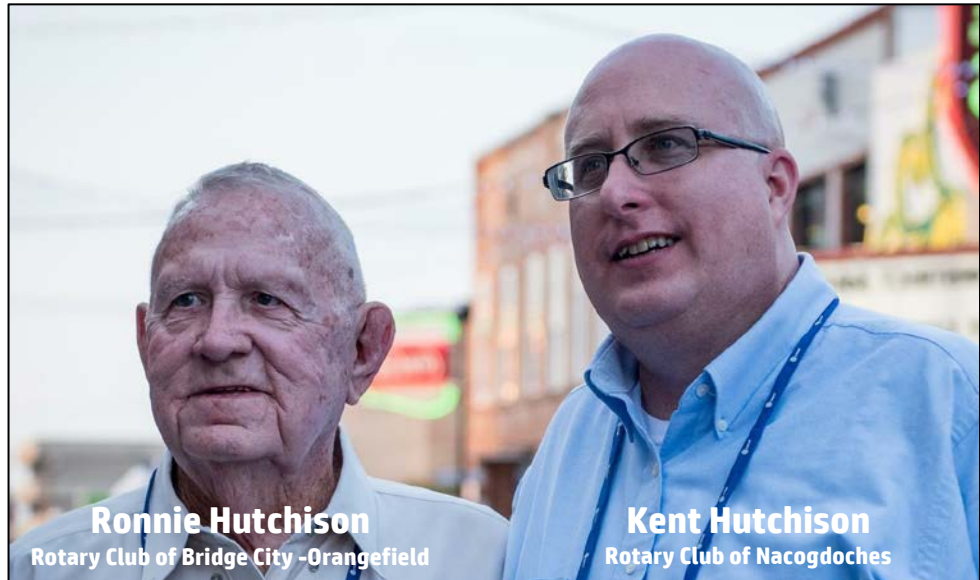


Networking

Business Lessons my Dad taught me

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As a child growing up, I watched my dad visit and stay in touch with folks around our small town of Orangefield, Texas. As a former school board member, each morning he would make the trek up to the administration building to have coffee with the superintendent and others. Then it was on to the local water office, credit union, and hardware store. Some 30+ years later, now in his eighties, my father still makes the rounds around town. He is also considered by many as an influencer in our community.



Now he does not refer to his activities as networking. It is just what he does.

Watching dad, I have learned some valuable lessons about business networking that have helped me grow my business and reputation.

No Agenda Necessary: Networking should not be for immediate gain. It is about building relationships, not agendas. Approaching networking with the right attitude, and heart is about being engaged and communicating your personal brand, your organization, and your vision to as broad an audience as possible. Over time, these seeds take root, and the value will return to you.

Give, and You Shall Receive: Before asking anything of anyone, make it a point to help others first. Influencers are regularly being asked for favors and advice. Building relationships is about adding value to others. To be successful in networking, you do so without really expecting anything in return. You will reap the benefits only after you give. Genuinely try to help other with what they need or want.

Networking Lessons

- No Agenda Necessary
- Give and You Shall Receive
- Connect Others
- Listening First
- Share Your Vision
- Be Ethical
- Include Other
- Give Others Your Full Attention
- Conduct Yourself Well

Connect Others: Helping others be successful is a magnificent way to establish the foundation for future value back to you. Become a super-connector and build your brand, by connecting others together without agenda or seeking anything in return.

Listen First: By listening to others, you can genuinely understand their specific needs. You can provide greater value by listening. Remember, networking is not always about your brand or business.

Give Others Your Full Attention: Looking around for somebody more desirable to visit with or speak to is a good way to doom a good relationship from the start. Give everyone your full attention and be genuinely present in conversations. Listen with your whole body, or as my mother taught me – listen with your eyes. If you find yourself mindlessly nodding without knowing what the other person is talking about, that may be a sign you are wandering. Every person matters.

Share Your Vision: Give your ideas away. If they like them, chances are you will be hired to execute them, and if they do not hire you and steal your idea, be complimented not disappointed.

Be Ethical: You may find yourself in a networking situation with the potential to cross ethical lines. Save yourself the misfortune, and do not be drawn into an unethical situation. I have made a lot of decent deals in business, and I have not had to cheat, screw over a business partner, or do anything else I am not proud of to make those connections.

Include Others: Make it a habit of introducing people to each other and making people feel included. Invite people to socialize before or after an event, or share a few drinks, dinner, and stories. Folks remember you when you make an effort to include them.

Conduct Yourself Well: Your personal brand is your reputation. Just remember, what happens in Vegas does not always stay in Vegas. While having a few adult beverages at that business conference (networking) may make sense, do not spoil the experience by going wild. There is a good chance your clowning around will end up published on one of the many social media sites. Internet search engines do not take your personal state of mind into account as it simply compiles search rankings, and before you know it, you could end up with some undesirable results (and photos or videos) attached to your name. Ok – this lesson I did not learn from Dad, as he does not drink alcohol– this is one I have learned the hard way. Learn from my missteps.

Watching my dad, I have also come to understand that there is no guaranteed way to ensure a good networking experience, but his lessons have made it somewhat easier. Each person we talk with is expecting something different, just as each personality leads to a different type of conversation. That said, having the basics down can lead to an improved and more meaningful connection. Try following these lessons during your networking opportunity – and seriously, do not drink too much at those happy hours.