

# Connecting With Clients

In the highly competitive business of corporate training for 11 years, and with a client roster heavy with top corporations, Diane Eade has never made a cold call. Every one of her clients has come from networking. And while the very word is enough to induce many to go back to bed -- covers pulled up, pillow placed over head -- Eade actually seems to have come up with a marvelously painless way of turning strangers into customers.

She speaks on "The Power of Networking" on Wednesday, July 16, at 8:15 a.m. at a meeting of the Princeton Chamber at the Nassau Club. Cost: \$25. Call 609-520-1776. Oh, and by the way, Eade says she got this speaking gig through networking. A colleague -- "really a competitor," she says -- had to drop out and called to ask if she wanted to step in. At least in part because she has won large clients through speaking engagements such as this one, she readily agreed. Eade grew up in Olean, New York. "In the middle of nowhere," is how she describes the charming western New York town, which is close to the Pennsylvania border, but not to much else. One of six children, she decamped for the University of Buffalo, from which she graduated in 1979. She studied a little of everything and found herself gravitating toward economics. "I had a natural affinity for business," she says. She used it to build a corporate career in brand marketing, but left, burned out, in her mid-30s.

"Brand management is stressful," she says. "The way it's set up, you're like a business owner. Your livelihood is based on how well your brand does. You have to bust a gut. It's a young person's game." Deciding she had learned all she could, and tired of being constantly on the road, she stepped back to assess. "When I thought about what I did like about the job," she recounts. "It was all about the people."

In 1992, Eade founded Advanced Leadership Group ([www.adv-leadership-grp.com](http://www.adv-leadership-grp.com)), which is headquartered in Rockaway, to offer corporate training and consulting. Not lacking confidence, she states that "I'm the best presentation skills trainer I've ever seen." That she can pull off such a claim gracefully is quite amazing. She says it with the ease that someone else might say "I'm a passable golfer" or "My team was fortunate enough to win the XYZ contract again this year." Just stating the facts.

Eade says she owes her effectiveness to empathy, and to the effort of learning to master a task that did not come easily. "The first time I gave a presentation, I came down with hysterical laryngitis," she confesses.

In addition to presentation skills, Eade has specialties in sales training and in diversity training. Of the latter she says, "It's not about being politically correct any more. The big corporations have moved way beyond that." It is now about making "a million different kinds of people" comfortable enough at work to do their best, become invested in the effort, and want to stick around.

Eade is able to offer these services to corporations -- and to win business -- because she has been smart about connecting with clients. Here is her blueprint for doing so:



**Ask for what you want.** Soon after deciding to start a business, a venture she recognizes as risky, Eade drew up a list of the 10 corporations with which she would most like to work. "I circulated that list to everyone I knew," she says. She asked all of her friends, her acquaintances, and the friends of her acquaintances to help her to meet contacts within the companies. "I gave the list to everyone I met," she says.

Using this wide net, Eade was able to set up meetings with seven or eight of the companies, and won contracts with three. "It was a whole lot more effective than anything I had ever done," she says.

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**Bring a friend along to meetings.** When a friend identifies a decision maker in a company in which she is interested, Eade tries to arrange a three-way meeting, preferably over a meal. Sitting down with her friend and her new contact means that the friend's credibility is instantly transferred to her. If the contact likes and trusts her friend, he is almost sure to have similar feelings for her.

If it is not possible to include the friend in a meeting with the contact, an introduction from him is second best, and far preferable to going in cold.

**Stand out from the crowd.** "When you're successful," says Eade, "everyone wants a piece of you." People in positions to grant contracts often are besieged by those trying to sell to them. Be different, she suggests. Don't talk about yourself, but rather ask about your new acquaintance. In fact, come to a networking event with a mental list of questions to ask the people you want to meet there. "People like to talk about themselves," she says. Give them every opportunity to do so, and under no circumstances use the occasion to talk only about yourself -- or worse, to deliver a canned sales spiel. And don't shove a business card into anyone's hand.

Networking, says Eade, is not about passing out business cards, it's about collecting them. Business cards thrust upon her find their way into the circular file -- fast.

**Ask not what your contact can do for you.** This is the meat of Eade's networking method. Upon meeting a new person, show a genuine interest in him, asking questions designed to elicit information about what it is that he needs. In asking about him, and about his business, build up to the most important question: "Who is your prospect?"

With this information in hand, move heaven and earth to bring the new contact together with this prospect. As an example, Eade says that a contact might sell copier machines. When she meets such a person, she scours her vast network, looking for someone who has recently complained about the quality of the copies in his office, or about poor service from his copier company. She then calls the person with the poor copies and puts him in touch with her new contact. She might want to win business from the new contact, but she puts this way, way on the back burner, and seeks, first of all, to do him a major favor by delivering business to his door.

**Make friends.** After bringing a new customer to his door, Eade is well on her way to making her networking contact her friend. "And notice," she says, "he still doesn't even know what I do. He doesn't know anything about me."

While most networkers, elevator speeches memorized, tell all and sundry all about themselves within seconds, Eade deliberately holds back that information until a friendship is flowering.

**Reveal yourself slowly.** The first time that a new business acquaintance asks Eade to talk about herself, she demurs. "I don't want to

talk about myself when they're just asking to be polite," she says. "I want to wait until they are genuinely interested." So, after the first query, she turns the questions aside, asking the contact to keep talking about himself. Only way down the line, after a relationship is developing, does she talk about her company and its services.

**Realize that this is a slow dance.** A first meeting is not the place to win business. "It does happen," says Eade, but it should not be the goal. If you begin to know several people at a networking event, the event has been a success.

As friendships, begun through networking, begin to deepen, results will inevitably follow. You will find business for your new contacts. Maybe you will forward them clippings about areas of common interest. You may even tip them off to vacation bargains, prime tee times, and excellent homes for sale in your neighborhood.

Then, says Eade, "the law of reciprocity kicks in." Your networking acquaintance, upon whom you have applied not one iota of muscle, will want -- really want -- to help you out, to send business your way.

July 9, 2003



Advanced Leadership Group  
*The Success Builders*  
9 Appio Drive  
Randolph, NJ 07869  
[www.adv-leadership-grp.com](http://www.adv-leadership-grp.com)