

Networking No-No's

By Anne Kadet February 5, 2003

ARE YOUR SCHMOOZING tactics turning people off?

- Employee-development consultant Andrea Nierenberg, with help from her students at New York University's management institute, surveyed 900 professionals, asking them to describe the worst things people do while networking. She got an earful. In her new book, *Nonstop Networking: How to Improve Your Life, Luck and Career*, she discusses the behaviors that do more harm than good and explains the right way to cultivate contacts.

SmartMoney: What were the biggest gripes you heard about networkers?

- Nierenberg: The top complaint was about people who act like they're trying to sell you something. They pounce on you and tell you all about themselves and don't give a damn about you. Another complaint is about people who lose interest if they don't think you can help them – the people who figure they need to network only when they need a job or need business. Getting too personal is also a problem. Don't share your life story. It puts people in an awkward position.

SmartMoney: How can you avoid looking like an opportunist?

- Nierenberg: The key is to give first, before you ask for something. Be a resource for people in your network. Go through your database and think about how you can help them. Every day, get in touch with three people just to say hello. I do this systematically. It could be something as simple as sending an article and including a note saying, "I haven't spoken to you in a while, but I thought you might be interested in this." Or let them know about an event they might enjoy. Or congratulate them on a recent accomplishment. Keep it sincere, keep it short and sweet, and make it about them. Don't go on and on about things they don't care about.

SmartMoney: And when you do need a favor, what then?

- Nierenberg: I recently got an e-mail from a man, copied to me and 50 other people. It said, "Dear friend. I'm looking for a new job. Please send me all your contacts." That's the height of negative networking. Never come right out and ask for a favor. It's a turnoff. **The best way is to approach someone for their advice and suggestions.** Ask them, "What would you do in a situation like this?" It flatters them. People will offer more help if you get them into a conversation and show a sincere interest in what they say.

SmartMoney: You emphasize updating people on your progress. Why?

- Nierenberg: A complaint I heard a lot is, "I referred this person to so-and-so, and they never got back to me to tell me how it went." That's one of the things that seems to drive a lot of people crazy. You have to follow up consistently. Anytime someone helps you or meets with you, send a handwritten note to say thanks for their time and consideration. If someone refers you to someone else, let them know how it went. You don't want them to hear about it secondhand. Plus, keeping people posted is a nice, non-threatening excuse to stay in touch.