

ONE CONNECTION

*How You Can Grow Your Business
(and Change the World) One
Connection at a Time*

Kevin Willett

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DON'T SPREAD YOURSELF TOO THIN

Most days, I think I'm Superman and I can do everything and attend every event. Then I realize I don't have any superpowers. Don't fall in to the trap of overbooking yourself. I see so many people do this and end up letting people down, because they have trouble getting things done on time. Spreading yourself too thin will do more harm than good.

TAKE CONTROL

You have to take control of your life if you want to be successful. I like being in control of everything, but it's not easy for a lot of people. Think about how you're spending your time and who you're spending it with. How is that affecting your business? It's easy to let busywork take up your time and make you feel productive when you're not really accomplishing anything that will build your reputation, attract clients, or bring in money. So pay careful attention to how you spend your time. You may even want to write a log of how you spend your time for a day or two. Breaks are important for your well-being, so I'm not suggesting you give those up. But pay attention to what you're doing between the breaks. You may be surprised at how much time is spent on unproductive busywork.

MEASURING THE ROI ON BUSINESS NETWORKING

I do realize that I told you not to give up on networking, and I meant it. But you do need to measure the ROI (return on investment) from the various groups you're a member of. When you first start your business, a large portion of your sales may come from one particular networking group. As your business and reputation grow, that may change. This is why it's very important to track where your referrals are coming from and the results of those referrals every year to determine whether you should renew your membership to a particular group. When you're making this calculation, factor in the cost of membership and the cost of your time to attend the events, as well as any meetings for coffee to follow up. You may be very surprised by the results. Again, please don't give up on networking. It may just be time to move on to another group if the one you're currently in is no longer producing the ROI you need.

TAKE TWO DAYS OFF

I was working seven days a week for six years when my body and mind revolted and demanded a break. I was so burnt out I could barely think straight. Please learn from my experience and don't make that mistake. I know how challenging it is to launch a successful business and how important it is to put your heart and soul into it, but you need to take time off and find balance in your life. Right now, I'm running two networking groups, hosting about 25 networking events

a month, writing a book, and speaking about business networking a few times a month. It's a pretty quick pace, but I force myself to carve out two days a month where I don't do any work. I've found that just taking a few days off helps my mind and body rest, which allows me to have better focus, which makes me more productive. Go to your calendar right now and block out two whole days and be sure to enjoy them.

WHY PEOPLE WHO DON'T NEED YOUR SERVICES ARE WORTH YOUR TIME

I've noticed that people often won't take the time to meet with people who don't need their services. They don't understand an important networking concept: You're not selling *to* your contacts, you're selling *through* them.

I was scheduled to meet someone who was interested in joining the group. He emailed me 30 minutes before the meeting saying he wasn't in a position to join at this time and asked me if I still wanted to meet up. To be honest, I was having a typical super crazy day and it was tempting to cancel. But I asked myself, "Is this the image you want this person to have of you?" Of course it wasn't, so I told him I appreciated his honesty, but of course I still wanted to meet with him.

It was a great meeting. We really hit it off and were able to refer some friends to each other. Now if I was silly and cancelled the appointment, I wouldn't have had that chance. So remember, although the people you meet might not need your services, they may have friends or

family who do. I'm happy to be someone's second choice when it comes to networking. I have made a successful business out of being second best.

READ

The best advice I can give you is to spend a few minutes each day reading about your industry. I like to spend a few minutes each day searching twitter for #networking. I've found some awesome ideas that I've been able to share with my followers. Try to schedule in a few minutes each day to read and share articles with your friends about trends in your industry.

SUMMERTIME NETWORKING

I find that many people take the summer off from networking. I may be biased because I run two networking groups, but I'll do my best to convince you that it's a really bad idea. If you disappear for three or four months, people may believe that you went out of business, especially if you're a new business owner. Also, you've been working hard to build relationships through networking. When you take several months off from events, it can feel like you're starting over. I suggest that you find time to attend one or two events a month that you really like and find valuable to keep your name out there. If you find that you simply cannot attend events, make sure you're staying in touch with your connections through your newsletter or by emailing them.

GUARD YOUR TIME

Last week, I was scheduling a meeting with a potential client. He said any time the following week would work, because he had nothing going on. That may be true, my friends, but never admit that. It sends the wrong message. Your time is a precious resource, so treat it that way. Many people ask to meet me for coffee because they want to talk to me about “something.” Sorry guys, I don’t have time for vague requests. If people don’t tell you why they want to see you, it’s a pretty sure bet you’re in for a sales pitch. Don’t waste your time meeting people who can’t give you a good reason to meet. You can also save time with meetings by doing them by phone or Skype. Please be respectful of your own time and that of the person you want to meet.

BEFORE EVENTS

SET NETWORKING GOALS

Way back when I first started Friends of Kevin, a woman spent about 45 minutes at one of my networking events. When I followed up with her, she said she was disappointed because nothing happened. I guess she missed the part of the book about the whole know, like, and trust thing. I asked her what she thought would happen and she said she didn't know. So I said, "Then how do you know it didn't happen?"

It's important that you set networking goals and that they're reasonable. A guy told me his goal was to attract five new clients at every event. I have to admit, I chuckled when he told me this. I asked him if he'd ever achieved that goal. He said he hadn't even come close. It's very important to set reasonable goals. When I first started going to networking events, my goal was to make three new contacts and then I could leave. Once I achieved that goal, I changed it to five new contacts. Eventually, my goal was to stay for the whole event. That may not sound like much, but I was really shy back then. So before you attend an event, set challenging but achievable goals to get the most out of your networking experience.

WHERE DO YOU BELONG?

Of course, I encourage you to always attend networking events. But you need to find events that potential clients

and partners will actually be attending. Before you attend any event or join any networking group, do your due diligence to make sure you're spending your time wisely. People often call me and ask if they should attend one of my events. They're surprised when I tell them they shouldn't attend a particular event. I want you to use your time wisely and I really can't lie about it, because you'll know if it was a good use of your time.

PURCHASE A REAL NAME BADGE

I highly encourage you to spend a few dollars and purchase a name badge, rather than using the "Hello my name is" badge available at events. This is an inexpensive way to look professional. The stick-on badge that's provided to you at the door has issues. First, can people read your handwriting? You don't want to be judged on bad penmanship. These nametags rarely last through the night without curling or falling off completely. If you get a real name badge, keep it simple. Make sure we can actually read the font. Just your name, title, and business name should suffice. A small logo is acceptable if there's room. People often try to put too much information on the badge, which makes the print tiny (unless you're wearing a billboard, and that's definitely a turnoff). Tiny print creates an awkward situation when we have to stand two inches away from you to try and read it.

REGISTRATION ETIQUETTE FOR EXCLUSIVE NETWORKING EVENTS

Networking events are either exclusive or open. Exclusive events are often limited by industry or by the

number of attendees. Only register for these events if you're sure you can attend, and notify the host immediately if something comes up and you can't make it. I host industry exclusive events as part of the New England B2B Networking Group and it's really challenging when people fail to show up. I try to invite people who I believe may be able to do business together or be great referral sources for the other attendees, so if one person is missing, it can impact the effectiveness of the event. Throughout this book, I'll ask the same question: "Is that the image you want people to have of you?" If you fail to show up to an exclusive networking event, the message you're sending is that you're not reliable. My friends, nobody wants to refer someone who isn't reliable.

OPEN NETWORKING EVENTS

Open networking events are open to everyone and are usually well attended. The hardest part of running networking events is getting people to register. Many people wait until the last minute to sign up to make sure they can attend. I respect this, but let me explain to you what goes on behind the curtain. When I'm hosting an event, I think about the size of the venue and how many people will fit in there comfortably. Some venues can hold 20 and some can hold 100. So if the venue holds 20, I invite people until I have 20 registered and then I stop, because I don't want to have 30 people attend a venue that only holds 20. So if an event has limited registration, waiting to register could mean missing out on the event.

As a friend of mine always says, people want to know what's in it for them. Here's what's in it for you: As the host, I review all of the registered attendees so I can do my best to introduce them to potential clients and partners. Also, many attendees review the list and ask me to introduce them to people they don't know. So by not registering, you're missing out on the chance to make those connections.

Lastly, I want to talk about what I call networking math. For open events, I find 30 is the magic number. If people see that 30 people have registered, they feel like everyone is going and they want to go too. If I have 20 or less, they feel that it's going to be a small crowd, so they'll often skip it. So you're doing the host a huge favor by registering early.

RESEARCH ATTENDEES

I have a friend who'll call me the day of a networking event and ask about every person who's attending, so he knows who to look for at the event. You might think this is a bit extreme, but it works for him. His goal is to meet great people who may be able to help his clients. I encourage you to research the attendees as a way to stand out at a networking event. Which of these scenarios do you like better? Someone walks up to you at an event and asks you who you are and what you do. Or someone walks up to you and says "Hello Joe, I'm glad to meet you. How's the printing business going for you?" I think we can agree that the second approach will make a much better first impression, especially because so few people will actually take the time to do

it. Try this out at your next networking event. I'm sure you'll be pleasantly surprised by the results.

YOU LEFT HOME WITHOUT YOUR BUSINESS CARDS?

I was meeting with a potential client and one of my friends was sitting at the next table. He leaned over and said "Hey Kevin, give me one of your business cards. My friend wants to learn more about your group." Guess what? I didn't have any cards with me. If I wasn't so embarrassed, it would've been funny, because the three of them — and it felt like everyone else in the room — all seemed to gasp. Kevin Willett, the professional networker, the guy who wrote this book and does all those videos about networking tips, has no cards with him! Epic fail, my friends. So when you're done reading this tip, put the book down and put some cards in your wallet, purse, bags, and car so you never have to feel as unprepared as I did that day.

DRESS APPROPRIATELY

I always suggest to my friends that they dress for the job they want, not the job they have. When you're at a networking event, people are judging you on your appearance. You don't need a \$5,000 suit to look successful or worthy of my business. But, if your shirt has wrinkles in it or your suit doesn't fit correctly, people may judge you as being sloppy or not having the ability to pay attention to details. If you're not sure what to wear to an event, call the host and ask, because you

can look silly and stuffy wearing a suit to a BBQ networking event.

Let me close out this tip with a story. A few summers ago, one of my friends came to a networking event wearing shorts and a company t-shirt. The first time he did it, I let it go, but the second time, I asked him if he ever watched Sesame Street when he was a kid. He gave me a puzzled look and said, "Sure, why do you ask?" I said, "Do you remember which one of these things isn't like the other? It's you, dude! You're the only one in the room wearing shorts." I know wearing a suit to summer events can be tough, but it's important to look professional at all times.

BREATH MINTS

Always carry breath mints when you're meeting people. Nothing leaves a worse first impression than bad breath. I don't want to know that you had too much coffee today or garlic for lunch. You don't want the odor coming out of your mouth to distract from the words you're saying. If someone offers you a mint, they're trying to send you a message, so please be grateful and take it.

USE THE BUDDY PLAN

A client told me that she struggles with networking events, because she has a hard time walking up to people she doesn't know and introducing herself. So I suggested she use what I call "The Buddy Plan" and go

with a friend. This can be a great way to feel comfortable at an event. When you do this, it can be tempting to just stand together all night in the corner. That's not networking! You have to mix and mingle with others. So if you're shy, try not to go with someone who's as shy as you.

I personally like to go to events with my friends and spend the whole night introducing them around. My friends are always extremely appreciative. I always smile because I also receive a lot of benefits from helping. First, my friends are thankful, and second, I get a chance to meet more people who think I'm a nice guy for helping my friends. Typically, when I'm at an event, people will ask me if I can introduce them too, so I'm often helping two or three people at each event.

If you don't have a buddy, call or email the host and ask if he or she knows anyone who can help. Most groups can pair you with one of their regulars to introduce you around. If you come to one of my events, just come over and stand next to me and I'll take care of you for the event.

EAT BEFORE YOU ATTEND AN EVENT

Unless you're attending a dinner, always eat before an event. People often say to me, "Kevin, there's free food. Why wouldn't I take advantage of that?" Have you ever tried to talk with someone who has a drink in one hand, a plate in the other, and a mouth full of food? How did that work out for you? It simply doesn't. If you need to eat, grab a quick bite and get back to the reason you

attended the event, to network. I always joke with my friends and say if you think you may have set a new world record for shrimp consumption at a networking event, then you're doing something wrong.

PROMOTE NETWORKING EVENTS YOU PLAN ON ATTENDING

Most people think it's easy to run a business networking event. I wish they were right. It's not the field of dreams they think it is. I don't just invite people and they attend. I have to follow up with them with emails and text messages and remind them. If you want to be my best friend, help me promote my events. Helping build the attendance benefits not just me, but you and the entire group as well. It creates chances to meet friends of friends and make new connections. I always tell people I run a really awesome networking group, but they might think I'm just saying that because it benefits me. When you share my events, you're helping me raise awareness of the group, while at the same time endorsing me to your friends and letting them know that, yeah, it really *is* an awesome networking group. For those who do that, I'm very grateful.

JUST GO ALREADY

If I had a dollar for every time someone told me, "I've been meaning to come to one of your events," I'd be writing this book from my own private island. It's okay to be apprehensive about attending events, but if you want your business to succeed, you can't use that as an

excuse not to attend. I remember when I first started networking. I kept saying I'd go to the next networking event, but on the day of the event I'd find some really good reason not to go, like being too tired. When I finally did attend, I was proud of myself for getting out of my comfort zone. I want you to stop reading for a minute and register for a networking event. Be sure to add it to your calendar, and when the time comes, push yourself to go if you have to, so you can get over your fear of networking. It worked for me and it will work for you.

DURING EVENTS

ARRIVE EARLY FOR NETWORKING EVENTS

The hardest part of hosting a networking event is the 15 minutes before the event begins. We hosts can get nervous thinking nobody's going to show up. If you arrive about 10 minutes early, the host will appreciate it. For myself, having someone to talk with takes my mind off of wondering how many people will show up and whether a good time will be had by all. What is in it for you? First, you can often spend some quality time with the host. I can only speak for myself, but when I have 10 minutes to talk with someone before an event, I usually end up introducing them to a lot of people simply because their story is fresh on my mind. Second, it allows you more one-on-one time with other early arrivers. Also, the host often needs help with some last minute preparations, so being that helpful person will go a long way towards building your relationship with the host. I'd like to thank everyone who shows up early for my events. Thanks for keeping me calm and entertained.

IF YOU CAN'T ARRIVE EARLY, ARRIVE ON TIME

I encourage you to treat networking events like appointments and arrive on time. I understand that this may not always be possible due to the location of the event or unexpected traffic. But if you arrive late to every event, people might believe that you'll show up

late for appointments you make with them as well, and nobody likes their time wasted. So do your best to arrive on time. It shows that you take your commitments seriously.

QUALITY OVER QUANTITY 2

I used to know a gentleman who would attend events and just walk up to people and hand them his card. One night I stopped him and said “Why do you pass out your cards to everyone in the room?” He replied, “So you’ll call me when you need me.” I said, “I’ll never call you, because I don’t know you or what you do, so please take your card back. Next time, take a moment to introduce yourself and tell me a little bit about what you do and then maybe we can work up to doing business together.” He frowned at me, grabbed his card, and hasn’t spoken to me since.

You’ll run into a number of “card pushers” at events. Their simple goal is to make sure that everyone in the room leaves with their card. My friends, when it comes to networking events, quality is always more important than quantity. You can’t meet everyone at a networking event, so don’t try. It comes across as though you’re running a campaign to be the president of the United States, trying to shake as many hands as possible. Instead, focus on having a few really good conversations with people who can help you and with people you can help. Those are the people you’ll build the “know, like, and trust” factor with.

ARE YOU DOMINATING THE CONVERSATION?

After I meet with someone, I try to evaluate how well I explained the benefits of my networking groups. Sometimes, guys, I want a do-over, because I realize I did a horrible job. It's important to understand the person's needs before you pitch your business. As you know, I host in-person networking events and I also promote my clients through social media. If I'm out at an event and I ask someone if she comes to events all the time and she says, "God no, I hate going to events," then it would be rather silly of me to tell her about my in-person events. I'd be better off talking about my social media promotion. God gave you two ears and one mouth for a reason. Try to listen twice as much as you speak.

BE POSITIVE

Have you ever met with someone who was negative about everything? You ask him how his day was and he says it was horrible. You ask her how business is going and she says it was her worst year ever. Now why would you possibly want to do business with a person like this, when you can't be sure she'll be in business next week? Please don't be negative when you're speaking with potential clients and business partners. It's a huge turnoff. Please don't use networking events to complain about your life. Remember to always be positive. Attitude is everything when you're trying to sell yourself and your work.

THE BIGGEST NETWORKING MISTAKE YOU'LL EVER MAKE

People often say to me, “Kevin, please only introduce me to people who have a need and the means to pay for my goods and services.” My friends, that is the biggest mistake you can ever make when networking.

Remember that you’re not selling *to* your network, you’re selling *through* them. I’d like to use myself as an example. My needs as a business owner are pretty straightforward. I need a phone, Wi-Fi, a computer, Mountain Dew, and pizza. Many business owners would totally dismiss me because I probably don’t have a need for their goods or services. But I’m a professional networker with over 20,000 connections (and growing). *Now* do you want to network with me? Don’t dismiss anyone. You never know where your next referral is coming from.

TO REDUCE YOUR FEAR OF NETWORKING, FOCUS ON GIVING RATHER THAN RECEIVING

I’ve found that when I focus my efforts on helping people connect at networking events, I always have a great night and end up signing a new client or picking up a few really great contacts. When you focus on helping other people, it takes the pressure off, because you’re not trying to sell anything, you’re just there as a resource. I’ve seen people fear networking simply because they don’t know what to say, or because they struggle to find that line between trying to gain new clients and coming across as pushy and aggressive. The next time you go to an event, ask everyone you meet

how you can help them or who you can introduce them to who might help them grow their business. This simple approach will help you stand out at networking events. Be prepared to answer that question for yourself when someone asks you.

BE APPROACHABLE AND SMILE

Have you ever walked into a networking event and nobody in the room would make eye contact with you? That has to be one of the most awkward feelings in the world. People want to feel welcomed when they arrive. So smile at them and say hello and welcome them into your conversation. I've made some great contacts just by being approachable and being the first person to talk to somebody new at a networking event. I have a friend who always talks about how I stopped in the middle of a story at an event and waved him over to listen and meet my friends because I knew he was new. We became friends that night because I showed him some love.

BE ABLE TO CLEARLY STATE WHAT YOU DO AND WHO A GOOD REFERRAL IS FOR YOU

This sounds pretty easy and straight forward, but often when I ask someone who a great referral would be for them, they tell me anyone with a pulse. My friends, we're back in the epic fail category. If you tell me financial planners and CPAs are great contacts for you, I can start helping you right away. There's an expression in networking that "everyone turns into no one simply because people don't know where to start." Here's an

AFTERWORD

Thanks for taking the time to read my book. I do appreciate it. My only hope is that you learned at least one thing that can help you feel more comfortable at your next networking event.

As I reflect on the experience of writing this book, and hosting hundreds of networking events, the best advice I can leave you with is to step outside your comfort zone and sign up for a networking event today.

The book offers some great tips on networking, but I've found that everyone develops their own style and networking personality. Don't worry about trying to use every tip in the book. Hand pick the ones you like the best and try them at your next networking event. I promise you that each event will become a little easier and soon you will be a networking expert.

If you have any questions about networking or anything in the book, feel free to email me at Kevin@friendsofkevin.com or you can always call me. My number isn't too hard to find.

I would like to ask you for one favor. When you feel you don't need this book anymore, please don't put it on your bookshelf. Please write your name on the inside cover, bring it to your next networking event, and pass it on to someone who is new to networking so that we can both help them.

Thanks for being my Friend,

Kevin