888.808.5009
Cindy@CreativeAssistants.com
www.CreativeAssistants.com

"Make Your Networking More Productive!"

PRIOR TO AN EVENT

- Before attending another networking event, ask yourself, *"What is my objective in attending?"* Are you looking for potential clients? Business alliances? Getting your name out there? Socializing? **Define your purpose & goals:** "I want to add x number of new contacts to my newsletter", "I want to find 1 new business alliance", "I'm looking for a contact from xyz company".

- Who will be attending the event you'll be attending? Attending every networking event in town leaves you little time for actual work. **Maximize your time and pare down what you attend to those events where your clients will be.** Are your clients Human Resources managers? Then connect with the local HR association. Are you looking for Realtors? Attend a meeting of the local Realtor association.

DURING THE EVENT

- Pay attention to the use of your business card at the event you attend. Are you handing your cards out like a Vegas dealer – giving one to every person you meet then quickly moving on? Or do you engage them in conversation and **only hand out a card when they ask for one**? Will your card be of value to them? If not, it will just end up in the trash can and your name forgotten.

- **Ask intelligent questions** to learn more about the business of a new contact. Otherwise, how will know if they are your client or if their clients could potentially be yours? What's their target market? What's their niche? What sets them apart from their competition?

- **Become a resource**. Find out what your new contact is in the market for – both personally and for their business. Are they looking for a CPA, are they in need of marketing materials, do they need a house painter? Then introduce them to those you know and trust. By providing value to your contacts, they will see the value in *you.* They will remember you.

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AFTER THE EVENT

- So what do you do after the event is over? **Do you have a plan of action** ready to put into place? How will you follow up with these new contacts? Call them to follow up, perhaps schedule a B2B meeting. Send a thank-you/"nice to meet you" note via e-mail or snail-mail. Add them to your newsletter list (but no spam!). If you sit around waiting for them to call you and use your product or service, it probably won't happen. You need to initiate contact and begin developing a relationship that will lead to referrals and business down the road.

- How are you organizing your contacts? **It's never too late to start your client database.** It doesn't have to be fancy and there are many free or inexpensive products out there – even inputting them into Outlook or an Excel spreadsheet is better than leaving them in a pile on your desk. The important thing is to **enter all new names within 24 hours** after the event - including notes about where you met, what you spoke about, their level of interest in your product or service. If you don't already have a system in place, start by entering all new cards as you receive them then slowly add your previous contacts later.

- **Have email templates and voice-mail scripts ready to use** when following up with your new contacts. While you'll customize them for each person, this will save you tons of time and help keep you from procrastinating!

I know this can seem overwhelming. **Start with one step at time** and slowly add on the others. I know of many resources to help with each of these steps and would be happy to refer you to them for assistance – just let me know!

– Cindy