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MOBILE AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Guest Columnist

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Rating Your Networking Skills

As members of the Mobile Area Chamber, we are constantly asking, "Does my membership help grow my business?" This is a valid question because we all want to make good business investments. Since the answers to this question are too many to name in one article, the one we will focus on is networking. For a moment, let's grade ourselves on how well we take advantage of the networking opportunities presented through our membership in the Chamber.

To see how well you network, answer the following questions, listing the choice best describing your habits, and then use the number beside your answer and evaluate your networking skills.

When you receive notice of a Chamber networking function, do you...
A. Delete, ignore or toss the invitation?
B. Think about attending, but never do?
C. R.S.V.P. and clear your calendar?

When getting ready for a social, do you...

- A. Dread it with extreme nervousness?
- B. Plan to stay no longer than 30 minutes?
- C. Restock your business card holder and make a list of the people you want to meet?

While at networking functions, do you...

- A. Speak only when spoken to?
- B. Go up to the first familiar face you see and hang with them the entire evening?
- C. Begin at one end of the room, chatting and exchanging business cards with everyone in your path?

After a social, do you...

- A. Rejoice because it is over?
- B. Move on to the next item on your "to do list?"
- C. Follow-up and schedule meetings with your new contacts?

How many networking socials do you attend a month?

- A. 0 - 3
- B. 3 - 5
- C. 5 or more

Do you view networking socials as...

- A. A place to force you to talk to people?
- B. A time to hang out with old pals?
- C. An opportunity to make new business contacts?

Give yourself one point for any 'A' answers, 2 points for 'B' and 3 points for 'C.'

Scores 6 - 9: You have plenty of room to grow. As professionals, we must step out of our comfort zones and focus on the big picture. View networking as an opportunity to meet your business goals. Once you take the intimidation out of networking, you then begin to enjoy it.

Scores 10 - 14: You are on the right track, but need to stay focused. With our hectic schedules, getting to networking events is the biggest battle. You are already

there, so seize the opportunity. Speak with colleagues, but don't forget to make new contacts.

Scores 15 - 18: You have maximized the networking opportunities of your membership. By utilizing these tactics when I attend the Chamber's numerous networking events, I average one to two new clients per event. Would one to two new clients a month help your bottom line?

The Mobile Area Chamber provides countless networking opportunities throughout the year to continue to test your skills and hopefully perfect them. The next time you ask, "Does my membership help grow my business?" rephrase the question to ask, "Am I utilizing my membership to grow my business?"

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