

More Effective Networking Using Sports Fandom



Anyone in business knows that networking is crucial for success. Whether you're trying to get a new job, prospecting new clients, expanding your circle of contacts or looking to increase your influence – all of it happens through networking.

Networking opportunities everyday. How well are you taking advantage of them?

Probably not as well as you think, if you're following the old "tried and true" method of handing out business cards and preparing an elevator pitch. Sports fandom and sports conversations give you the upper hand in building relationships that lead to business.

Here's how to become more effective at three main components of networking using sports.

1. Opening Question

Without Sports: "Where are you from?"

With Sports: "Who's your team?" or "Which team do you cheer for?"

Here's why – you'll get more information out of asking about a favorite team. More information leads to stronger connections.

For example, I cheer for the Houston Astros because I grew up in Houston. My parents, brother and sister-in-law still live in the Houston area. Even though I've lived in Seattle 14 years I still consider myself a Texas gal and make it home a couple times a year thanks to my job with the Seattle Mariners.

That 3-sentence explanation answer is a treasure trove of information for people looking to connect with me. If you asked me where I'm from the answer is much shorter and would sound something like this. "I grew up in Texas, but live in Seattle." Which answer would you rather have?

Even non-sports fans will give you an explanation as to why they're not interested in sports, which is helpful information for future conversations.

2. The Pitch.

Without Sports: Preparing a 30-second pitch relating to what you do

With Sports: Preparing a 15-second success statement tied to a sports topic.

Here's why – You have limited time to make a good first impression. It's not about you it's about the person you're trying to connect with or serve. Just because you're talking doesn't mean the other person is listening. You have to have a hook to the conversation.

For example, if you're a Seahawks fan, build on the Super Bowl win. It could sound something like this. "As a Seahawks fan I'm going to be celebrating that Super Bowl win for a long time, but I'm also celebrating the new program we just launched. Both have been huge milestones this year."

That pitch has more intrigue. If the person is interested in hearing more, they'll ask about your program. If they're not interested they have the opportunity to talk about the Seahawks and the Super Bowl.

If the conversation ends up swinging toward the Super Bowl, it doesn't mean you missed your chance to network or make an impression. The conversation is more important than your pitch. People do business when they're a likability and trust factor in place. Conversations get you to that point.

3. Follow up

Without Sports: Forcing business cards or resumes on new contacts

With Sports: Use the sports calendar to plan follow-up conversations

Here's why – you're not going to get hired or do business after one conversation. Don't force the issue. Look for ways to naturally build relationships over a series of exchanges.

I see this happen all the time. We've been taught to hand out business cards and resumes because somewhere, someone told us you've got to take advantage of your one chance. You do. But it has nothing to do with forcing a resume on someone. I've spent years working alongside professional athletes and coaches, I can tell you from personal experience it takes an average of 5 connection points to build the trust I need to effectively work with them. It's not that much different in other work environments.

If you want to build relationships with potential employers or clients schedule a minimum of 5 conversations (it's best to use a combination of email, phone and in person conversations) related to upcoming sporting events or sports headlines. For example, if you're trying to stay on the radar of a Houston Astros fan you would want to reach out at the start of Spring Training, on Opening Day, after a big win, during the All-Star break, and toward the end of the season. You have a natural and easy entry point to the conversation, you can stay on the radar without being a pest and most importantly you're building rapport and relationships.

