

Hitting the Why Notes: Why Following Up Is Following Through



Amy Grat (WTS-LA member and International Trade Education Programs Chief Executive Officer), Photos © John Livzey, 2016

Woody Allen said, “Showing up is 80 percent of life.” Though joking, he’s not wrong in many respects. But WTS-LA member and International Trade Education Programs (ITEP) chief executive officer Amy Grat takes exception in one particular area.

“I go to events all of the time and I’m on a lot of social networks,” says Grat of her role at ITEP, a non-profit organization that connects the international trade business community to the classroom to develop career-ready, college-prepared high school students. “And I will go to an event and meet 20 or 30 people. I’ll take their business cards and give them mine. On average, do you know how many people follow up with me? Zero. Not one. And some of these are



people who sought me out to meet me! Some of them are looking for a job from me! That’s just crazy, but it happens all of the time. People simply file away your business card when they get back to their office. Then they forget you. Worse still, they often put you in their CRM (customer relationship management) system without asking and then you get spam from them after that. What kind of message does that send? Sometimes it feels like I’m the only one that ever follows up.”

Grat’s feeling may not be that far from the truth. Statistics support her belief. Though accurate data on networking follow-ups is hard to come by, numbers on the issue in an analogous situation abound—sales.

According to the website *The Marketing Donut*, “44% of sales people give up after one ‘no,’ 22% give up after two ‘nos,’ 14% give up after three ‘nos,’ and 12% give up after four ‘nos.’ That tells you that 92% of sales people give up after four ‘no’s,’ and only 8% of sales people ask for the order a fifth time. When you consider that 80% of prospects say ‘no’ four times before they say ‘yes,’ the inference is that 8% of sales people are getting 80% of the sales.”

Put in the perspective of networking or job hunting and you can see that following up is *everything*. It also suggests that only following up once is of lesser value when really seeking to make a connection. Following up several times and meaningfully makes the real difference. But Grat doesn't stop there.

“You have to change your perspective on exactly what following up is, on what it means. Following up is a fantastic opportunity to connect with someone. It's a chance to shine and highlight elements of your work or your character. It's also a forum to compliment the person you're trying to connect to. Use that forum to demonstrate to that person that you care about their work, that you're passionate. Following up is an extremely powerful, multifold opportunity. Unfortunately, most people miss this opening.”

While there are no hard-and-fast rules for following up, here are some common-sense guidelines.

Strike While the Iron Is Hot

Follow-ups have a shelf life. While it may never be too late, sending a timely follow-up—when someone's impression of you is fresh in their mind—is much better than waiting. The sooner it arrives, the better. Having said that, don't give up if that card is still sitting on your desk weeks later. A thoughtful, well-written note that includes a refresher on how you met is always welcomed.

It's a Formal Letter, Not a Form Letter

Though you may have chatted like old friends, remember not to get too familiar with your contact. Be polite. Be humble. Be brief. While you certainly want to inject your personality into a follow-up, it's important to remember that this is business. And you can never go wrong by being too polite. The note should also not be too dry. As Grat suggests, the best thing to do is reference what you discussed and what you learned about the contact. Everyone wants to hear about themselves and know that you were listening.

Let Your Note Do the Stalking

People are busy. When they tell you to follow up with them, that does *not* mean call them or email them every day (or multiple times a day) until they respond. That can be scary and certainly not positive. There is no one rule for follow ups; each meeting is different. So, common sense must win out. Dash one note off soon after you meet. Wait a week. Contact them again. If you get no response, contact them again and ask if you should cease and desist. If you still get no response, move on.

Showing up may be 80% of life, but sometimes it's not enough, particularly when it comes to networking and following up with connections. Again, Amy Grat believes it's essential.

“I try to *always* follow up, even if it's just an email. It doesn't have to be a perfectly crafted, epic letter. It can be a simple note. Of course, it behooves someone—particularly a job candidate—to write a simple, straightforward note (that references our initial meeting) on professional business stationery. But even just a quick, dashed-off email means much more than simply ignoring someone.”