Build relationships to build your business

What you need to do

Building relationships is crucial for finding out about business opportunities, gaining the resources you need, winning customers and getting help and advice.. Any successful business relationship has be based on trust and respect and be mutually beneficial to the individuals involved.

This involves:

1. establishing business relationships by effective networking
2. laying the foundations for long term business relationships
3. developing effective strategies for continuing stable business relationships

What you need to do

- invest time in networking activities and build a network of business contacts
- be prepared to make the first approach when an opportunity to network arises
- establish rapport with others quickly and effectively and make a good first impression
- make sure you communicate a consistent message, including your non-verbal signals
- find and use effective techniques to learn and remember other people's names
- make a note of relevant information you learned about an individual or organisation
- tell people clearly what you have to offer and how it is of benefit to your customers
- make sure that you make contact effectively with as many people as possible in any networking situation
- follow through on commitments to make further contact or take action
- let people know why as soon as possible, if you cannot deliver what you have promised
- recommend other people in your contact network when you are unable to provide a service or product
- find ways to keep in regular contact with new and existing contacts
- identify business relationships that are not working as well they should and try different ways to improve them
- take into account the differences between people from different backgrounds in your business relationships

- recognise that people have different approaches in their dealings with others and adapt your behaviour to accommodate this where possible and appropriate

What you need to know and understand

Communication

- how to develop rapport quickly when meeting people (for example by using appropriate eye contact, friendly demeanour and a firm handshake)

- how body language can influence your communications with others

Business relationships

- how to create a good first impression (for example by finding out what others are interested in and encouraging others to talk about themselves)

- how to listen attentively to other people and paraphrase to show that you have actively listened

- the importance of acting with integrity to others at all times

- what you need to do to develop and maintain respect and trust in business relationships

- how important it is to recognise and respect appropriate boundaries in your relationships with others

- how you benefit by introducing and referring your business contacts to others when the opportunity arises

- how to maintain networking relationships (for example by making time and space in your diary to meet or talk with others relevant to your business even when you are under pressure)

Networking

- The range of networks that are available to help your business, for example,

    general business membership organisations such as the Federation of Small Businesses, Forum for Private Businesses and Chamber of Commerce;

    trade or industry association;

business clubs and networking organisations;

your customers and suppliers;

professional advisers; and

family, friends and other informal contacts).

- the benefit of a geographical network to local businesses in influencing regional decisions or in getting funding for joint action

- how to spot business opportunities in networking situations by listening to what other people do and finding possible connections with your own business

- how to be effective in networking situations (for example, by taking other people's contact details or business card and agreeing when and how to get in touch)

- how to promote what you do in a way that will encourage other people to find out more about your business

Culture and personality

- how to recognise, learn about and respect the differences between people from different cultures or backgrounds

- what makes people behave in certain ways

Information and advice

- how to find specialist advice and support to help you to develop your skills in networking