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'Business Development 101' with Marilynn Mendell. Part 3: Look Great and Act Like a Leader

Guest Blog

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Along with an understanding of business ethics and a solid plan, a professional must have polished social behavior and practice the correct decorum in order for business development to shine.

Appearances matter because people feel comfortable when things are in their proper place. It would be natural to become upset if salt came out of a peppershaker. Meeting the expectations of others allows people to concentrate without socially unacceptable distractions.

Humans feel safe when the dress code is formal and everyone comes in black tie. We're basically animals around a watering hole. When a lion steps over to drink, the rest of the water buffalo stampede in the opposite direction. There is no time off either. Looking and acting with impeccable taste and decorum means standing in line at the airport, walking down

the street on a day off, attending an out-of-town conference, and eating in a restaurant across the ocean. Always be prepared to step into a meeting with an important client.

One of the primary rules of business development is to figure out how to make people feel relaxed and happy. That includes treating everyone equally, especially the garage attendant, the waitress or the receptionist —because anyone could be watching at any time. Conversely people who aren't naturally considerate to others might have a sociopathic character flaw where empathy doesn't exist. Most clients prefer to steer clear of that personality type. Make being kind, honest, and interesting a habitual lifestyle choice.

Presentations, social events, or negotiating deals could become failures because of minor subliminal clues given off by the color of a suit, the choice of shoes, or garlic breath. Learning when to slip on the navy suit (selling-power) and when to wear the brown suit (listening-not dominant) can be just as beneficial as knowing that flip flops are never acceptable in any business situation.

Smart up instead of dumbing down. Learn the local rules. Attempt to emulate leaders. For instance few people have perfect table manners, and yet most diners know that chewing with their mouth closed while eating trumps the hungry man with elbows on the table gnawing at the bone approach. Table manners are the easiest thing to learn and a zillion books exist on the subject. Try any by Letitia Baldrige.

Business development requires attendance at many social events. Plan ahead and try to pinpoint key people to speak with during the party. Once at the event (with a name tag on the right) move through the room maintaining a flow and time causal conversations to last about two minutes. Introduce people to each other. Offer to get a cocktail for someone. Never interrupt and don't pull a business card out until it has been requested.

Conversation remains the currency of the business development world. Someone who can engage a table of ten and leave a lasting impression will often receive a call the next day for an interview or a game of golf. Learn to play sports and take an interest in many different kinds. It's the easiest way to begin a dialogue. Whether male or female, sports knowledge can always augment expertise in any given field. Develop a plan to take lessons.

Additionally, learn the nuances of food and wine, travel to interesting places, visit museums, and attend musical events across a wide spectrum. Shallow knowledge can provide a start and filler for conversations, but ultimately expertise both within the business realm and with hobbies will prove quite beneficial.

Be sure to speak with the person on the right and left equally. Asking questions can get things going, however eventually people will expect information to be shared. The more diverse a business development professional's interests the more attractive they become in a group and as an individual.

Finally, at events when the color guard appears, or the national anthem is song, or the benediction is given, absolute quiet and stillness must occur. It doesn't matter who else is talking, or if a client speaks on their phone, always respect these occasions. Speakers often say after a conference that they saw so and so talking through their entire speech. Bad news travels much faster than good, and always remember once a step is taken outside a home everything becomes public. Look great and act like a leader.

Marilynn Deane Mendell is the president of WinSpin CIC, Inc. a marketing and change management consulting business in the Washington, DC region. She is an adjunct professor at Georgetown University where she teaches Business Development for Residential and Commercial Real Estate. This an introductory series of articles dedicated to the four Principles of Business Development: 1. Ethics/Integrity/ Honesty; 2. Planning and Scenarios; 3. Appearances; 4. Appreciation.

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