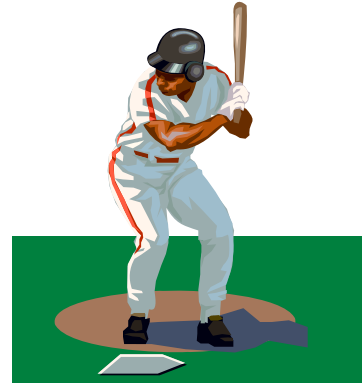


How to Hit Home Runs With Networking Contacts

Baseball is the only major sport in which the defensive team initiates the action. The game doesn't start until the ball is delivered from the pitcher. Offense begins by stepping up to the plate.

When you think about it, the same is true when networking. To reach contacts and secure referrals, you must step into the batter's box. You may strike out at first, but eventually you'll hit a home run that leads to the opportunities you seek.



If you want to improve your networking efforts, it helps to know a few basic rules. Start by thinking of networking like baseball, and yourself as a player, not a spectator. That's when the "church of baseball" will lead you down the right path and help you start batting out of the park.

Initiate Contact

Like contact hitters in baseball, effective networkers make connections and create new opportunities.

Don't start by struggling to meet people outside your primary circle of contacts. Instead, create a strategy that allows you to feel comfortable reaching out to others. Family, friends, former employers and colleagues, clients and customers of current and former employers, vendors, current or former classmates, professors, club and church members, and current or former neighbors are all excellent resources. Remember that the people who are the closest, most accessible, most comfortable to talk to and the most capable of helping are often the ones who are overlooked.

Strike-Outs Are Mandatory

Don't lose heart if you repeatedly swing and miss. Striking out is part of the game, but sitting on the bench and watching the game go by is far worse. Remember that baseball's leading hitters make successful contact only three times out of 10. They also step up to the plate more than 500 times a year.

When networking, what seems like a strike could later prove to be a home run. In fact, good networkers don't worry about immediate results. Instead, they realize the power of building bridges, seizing control of their fates and taking action on their own behalves. Their desired objective may be to discover new opportunities, but cultivating contacts is their real reward.

Be Persistent

Networking features a peculiar irony: If you increase your rate of failure, you'll also increase your rate of success.

Years ago, an American entrepreneur had this very experience. To finance his dream project he visited 301 banks, which all denied his request for capital. But an officer at the 302nd bank said, "OK, we'll help you build your theme park, Mr. Disney." Perseverance paid off for Walt Disney, and it will pay off for you as well.

Play Extra Innings

Baseball is a nine-inning game, but a tie game requires extra innings—as many as it takes—to decide the winner. The time limit is virtually infinite.

Networking also has infinite time restrictions. It begins when you interact with people, either by making direct contact or putting yourself in situations where you make an impression, and it can go on forever.

A Year-Round Game

Step up to the plate and play the game year-round. Baseball players who work hard in the off season are better prepared to endure the grind of a seven-month, March-to-October schedule.

After all, networking, like the church of baseball, is open all year long.

