



## Episode 16

# Boost Your Business through the Power of Networking with Christine Clifton

Janice Hostager: 0:04

I'm Janice Hostager. After three decades in the marketing business and many years of being an entrepreneur, I've learned a thing or two about marketing. Join me as we talk about marketing, small business and life in between. Welcome to my weekly marketing. So how do you feel about networking events? Are you the type that avoids them at all costs, or do you get kind of giddy at the thought of one? I know I'm weird, but I actually love networking events. The energy that I gain from a good networking event can carry me through the entire week. But it wasn't too long ago that I dreaded them, and I would arrive with sweaty palms and try to slip in unnoticed, moving around the walls of the room looking for somebody who appeared to feel as awkward as I did. Anybody else? But one thing is for sure, networking skills are learnable, and if you've got a B2B business, I would argue that they are crucial to learn. My guest today is going to give us some great tips for navigating networking events.

Christine Clifton has had years of networking experience. She teaches mindful company professionals and service entrepreneurs to say what they need to say and get where they want to go, so they can have the freedom, fulfillment and flow in their life that they deserve. She believes that highly relational people often hold back, feeling fearful upcoming cross as self promoting or selfish. Christine shifts the belief system, getting in the way of using their true voice and following their calling. She teaches them ways to authentically communicate, as well as clarify their next steps in life and work. She's the author of three books, including "You Don't Have to Show It to Stand Out". Here's my interview with Christine.

Janice Hostager: 2:00 Welcome, Christine, it's great to have you today.

Christine Clifton: Thanks so much for having me.

So, Christine, you're here to talk about networking. Tell me your story. What led you to become an expert on the topic of networking?

Christine Clifton: 2:17

Well, I certainly didn't set out to be one. I spent 20 years in corporate and decided to start my first coaching practice as I left corporate. And I bumbled around doing what I saw other people doing, and the funny thing is that they're not taught how to do networking either. So I start mimicking what I'm seeing, which isn't educated networking, and things just weren't showing up like I thought they would. In terms of my activities, I'm a bit of a root cause gal. I'm just naturally interested in things like what is the root cause of a problem? And as I started looking at what I was doing and where things were working or not working, I started creating a bit of an ecosystem for myself in terms of activity, and then people wanted to know how I was doing it and I started teaching people. So that's my quick evolution of how I got here as a networking. And it's really more of the actual conversation. I'm a bit of an introvert, though I'm technically an ambivert, and so I was attracting a lot of people who were introverted as well, and when I pulled them to find out what their biggest pain was when networking, they said things like you know, the first stepping up to a group of people, what do you say? Or if somebody says something that we don't know how to respond to, what do we say? And so it all kept coming down to what do I say. And that's where my expertise started growing was the actual conversation, not just the networking 101 stuff.

Janice Hostager: 4:03

Oh, that is interesting. Because one of the questions I had for you is that when you do walk into a networking event, it can be a little awkward if you don't know people. And I'm kind of weird in that I love going to networking events. I always leave more energized than I came, but I know there's a lot of people who are more introverted that just hate networking events. So what do you have to say to people that know they need to network, they know they need to go to the events? What tips do you have for them? Like, what do you do when you walk into the room? It can be super awkward at first.

Christine Clifton: 4:40

Yeah, it sure can, and actually I used to teach dance as well. One of the big challenges for people was turning, and I would say, hey, it's not about the turn, it's about the step before the turn. If you're off balance on the step before the turn, your turn is going to stink. Same thing with networking. What's the step before you go networking? And so the biggest tip I have is, especially if it's the first time going, call the organizers, message the organizers, let them know it's my first time. Is there a particular process that you use here? Do you have a cards table? Whatever kind of question opening question you might be comfortable with, and the people hosting are going to be thrilled because they're hosting a networking event, so they want people to come. That's my first tip that few people do. Contact the organizers, and another idea is to also volunteer to set the room up before the event or with them, and the reason that can be key for people who are a little more on the quiet side is that then you're there already as people are arriving, and it's usually more comfortable that way when people start floating in the door, and then you've had those little conversations with the people who run the group before people arrive. And you can let them know who you want to meet or who would be a good connection for you, and you can ask them to introduce you. That's a great tip.

Janice Hostager: 6:15

Yeah, I know that I would often offer to just be at the registration table when people came in, because then you get to meet everybody. And it's a less like it's a less awkward thing if you're just saying hi, what's your name, so I can get your name badge, versus walking up to somebody or a group of people, which is, I think, even harder. You're walking up to a group of people and kind of introducing yourself when they're already in a conversation. So I love that tip. I think it's a great one. So what kind of conversation do you recommend people have? Is there some sort of, like you said, it starts before you go to the networking event? Is there something in which you can mentally do to prepare yourself for going into the room? Or I don't know, would you just approach with a list of questions? Or how do you pre-plan for an event like that besides contacting the event organizer?

Christine Clifton: 7:13

Sure it's. That's another thing that I did wrong when I first started networking is that I was just going to anything and everything. And I began to be spending so much time networking and not getting any results from it. And I'm I don't know about you, but I like to get the most out of any energetic output. I chose to do so I had to look at how I could be more efficient at this thing while still being my natural relational self. You know we all hate that network or that deals out their business cards like a poker hand. You know, when we meet them and we don't want to be like that. You know that's icky, and if you talk to a business owner, they'll tell you well, I have a marketing plan. I have a business plan. And I say, do you have a networking plan? And then there's crickets chirping. And so they don't even think about yeah, networking is in my marketing plan, but what is your networking plan? And to me that is key because when you, that's where the you know tire hits the road, because you're saying where am I going to go, who are my peeps, who am I? And I can purposely and intentionally choose the right groups to attend. What goals do I have for any particular networking event? Few people walk in with a goal and I don't mean I'm going to meet five people's goal. I mean, okay, I have an internet class I'm teaching next month, so at this networking event I'm going to be talking about bridging people into my class. Or my chamber is having a visitor's day, so at this networking event I'm going to invite them to my chamber's visitor's day. That can really help with the planning, because you're already kind of downloading the words you're going to be using when you talk with people. As opposed to having to think on the fly, you're already thinking ahead, like, okay, these are where I'm going to bridge people to. So a lot of people go networking and they just do the networking. I call it spastic marketing. So you know, they twitch and they do networking and they twitch and they speak once or whatever. But are you connecting them? How are you bringing people into? And I say build a bridge because you can invite people across that bridge. So when you walk in, there's a couple things. I'm also just a sidearm behavioral side, a side what do you call it? Armchair behavioral scientist. Okay. So I walk in, I look at body language and most people in networking conversations, there's going to be someone standing at like a 45 degree angle, somewhere in that either not really a circle, but like a half circle. And the funny thing is you don't have to say anything. All you have to do is walk up and stand there and listen to the person talking very interestingly and they will naturally, you know, wind down and look at you and say hi, welcome, and, you know, bring you in because, guess what, they're there networking as well. So look for those body positions that are at the 45 degree angle and use that as your first go in terms of approaching people. The questions that I like to ask people most people start you

know, guess what? What do you do? You know that's our first question, and people who are relational want to get to know the human behind the business. So if you're one of those highly relational people, like we are, then ask them instead hey, where did you come? Where did you come from, like, where did you drive from today? Or where do you live in the area, which is your favorite part about this networking event? So you're getting them conversing about them, and it's an introvert's dream to get other people to talk about themselves. But it's also our curse if we don't also interject ourselves in that conversation as well, and so we can talk later, if you'd like, about some techniques that way. So look for body language. Let the natural progression of how networking works take its course. People want to meet you too. It's not all on you in terms of responsibility, and think about being relational as opposed to being business-like.

Janice Hostager: 11:47

Oh right, right, Yeah, and that I think that is something to keep in mind too. Oftentimes people will come in, like you said, with a stack of business cards and they'll have their elevator pitched down And you kind of want to get behind all of that to get to know them, because people do business with those. They know life and trust right. So try to get past the facade of that business person And just finding the person behind it, i think is so important.

Christine Clifton: 12:17

I do too. And the elevator pitch thing one of the talks I do is ditch the pitch because it sounds canned or inauthentic. So I guide my clients to create what I call position statements. So what do you believe in about your business? What do you stand for? A lot of us end up being a little contrarian in our industry. It's what makes us stand out. So, for example, what I just said about the elevator pitch, like ditch the pitch, so that's a little contrarian to what everyone's taught. I would rather hear a position statement, and one of mine I have several. One of mine is if someone says what do you do, christine? I say you know, I believe that as great as technology is, it's pushing us behind screens of all sizes And it's causing our conversation muscles to atrophy. So I'm on a one woman mission to bring back the art of conversation in the workplace, to keep those human connections alive. That may have taken me 20 seconds, i didn't time myself, but people are listening to you, you know, and then they're like they're nodding their heads, usually within the first two seconds, because I'm talking about screens, and that's also a way to get your personality across And what you stand for, because people look. You know, some of us will say, if you go out on the street and you're wearing a red hat, you're looking for other people wearing red hats. It's an affinity connection. So using position statements is a way of beginning to collect affinity people, and it's not necessarily your target market. I mean, no one wants to be a target anyway. Right, it's about having a similar kindred spirit in your network who believes what you believe.

Janice Hostager: 14:16

Yeah, that is. That's very powerful, I think, someone I heard once and I kind of think about this every time I go to a networking event. They said they walk in there with the idea in mind that they want to serve everybody in the room. So they will approach people and talk a little bit but then say how can I help you today? And people are thrown off by that because they're not looking for that in somebody they meet there. They're looking for somebody who comes in with

a sales pitch. You know, and I think it kind of throws people a little bit, but it also opens the door to what you're saying is that you're a human being, you're a very giving person. You know, that's a great, another great way to make connections, I think.

Christine Clifton: 15:03

Oh, absolutely, yeah, for sure. And, and to your point, it's about also asking who you are, what I'm? a bit, because I'm a word nerd. I'm a bit like Mrs Seuss as well, and I like things to have cadence to them and I love alliteration. So I'll say who you are, who they are, what you do And what you say. So you don't want to leave yourself out of the equation entirely, even when you're offering to give right. So make sure that when you're giving, be prepared to ask for what you need, whether it be connection or you know an idea, whatever the case might be. So, yes, it's all about harmony. I look at it like it has harmony, harmonizing my activities.

Janice Hostager: 15:54

Yeah, yeah, I love that little quote. By the way, I'll put that down somewhere.

Christine Clifton: 15:59

Please do Yeah, feel free.

Janice Hostager: 16:03

So what do you have? Have you been to speed networking events? I have, yeah. How do you feel about those? Do you think that they're fruitful or do you think that they're counterproductive? you know the connection. You know what I mean. If there is something that actually takes away from connections, or I don't know, what are your thoughts on those?

Christine Clifton: 16:24

You know, here's what I think. First of all, it depends on the environment right, and how well they're run. I know that sounds silly, but it's true. The other thing is that when I first went to coaching school and we were learning to coach people, you know, it took us a while to go through a sample coaching conversation And what my teachers taught us was also to how to have a 10-minute coaching conversation And it's amazing how much we can get done in 10 minutes because we were pressed to produce, so to speak, in that 10 minutes. So I think there's some good to the speed networking, because I believe because people aren't taught how to be efficient in their networking that they often, you know they show up to an event, they'll talk to a whole bunch of people and they walk out without anything, where the speed networking events really make them get really concise, really focused for short periods of time, work the room as much as you're able to in that kind of round robin process, and then you can always go back to the person or set up a follow-up with that person. That really piqued your interest at the end of that. So I think for the most part it's a good thing. I wouldn't solidarily or only do speed networking but, I think it's good. I think it teaches people that you can get a lot done in a short period of time and it teaches us to take. I like to say you know how you do it? elephant, it's a bite at a time. You don't want to be firehosed when you're networking. It's like I want to meet you first, I want to date you next, then we'll go steady, then maybe you know you'll propose. So remember that you're not going to necessarily sell at a networking event. So just take that first

bite, get that first meeting and then again your networking plan. How, what process, what ecosystem do you want to put in place in your business to invite people to that next step after networking? And that can vary based on who you are, what you prefer as well. If you want to be efficient, if you want to meet in person or would you rather do it on Zoom or the phone, like you know, you get to choose. But be ready for that next step, because the follow up is the second biggest pain point for people who go networking. Because they'll say I have a stack of business cards at the corner of my desk collecting dust, what do I do? And I'm like well, I can tell you what to do with them, but I can also tell you how to avoid that. And the point is that you want to bridge at the networking event, right there. Either get permission or go ahead. You know, get permission to contact them or send them your booking link, or go ahead and get it on your calendars. That's the easiest way, because then you don't have to get bogged down in it. How do you follow up and chase somebody down to, you know, to try to book something?

Janice Hostager: 19:20

Yeah, yeah, I think you know. Nowadays, what I've noticed is that so many networking events and conferences, too, they will, instead of handing out business cards, they will have a QR code that on their badge that everybody should scan, which in itself is a little bit weird and awkward, because you can be talking with somebody and suddenly you'll have to say excuse me, do you mind if I scan your badge? You know, and so you do that. But in a way, what you're saying is that you are making that connection right there, so they know that you're interested in following up with them because you're scanning their badge, you know, whereas before everybody just grab a business card and then I would follow up on LinkedIn or something like that usually. But yeah, I don't know. Do you have an opinion about the QR codes? I kind of don't like them as well, but I don't know. I personally don't either.

Christine Clifton: 20:15

I think again. I think you and I might be a particular psychographic. that don't The first. I was exposed to that as a concept way before it got popular And I really felt like you know, I don't know constriction in my body about it. The other thing is that I think business cards can be fun and they can also be different. I've had wooden nickels as my business cards. I've had square business cards. You know it. To me the business card can also be this thing, this tangible thing that people remember you by. And many people have a tendency and I'm one of them. When something goes into an electronic device it's out of sight, out of mind.

Janice Hostager: 21:03

Yes.

Christine Clifton: 21:03

Whereas when I bring you know if I were to bring one of my wooden nickels home, you know, or it's actually called a round to it. I don't know if you ever heard that joke. It's a round. And it says T-U-I-T. Across it, like are you ready to get around to it? And at the time I was doing marketing, telemarketing solo for solo nurses. So again, I'm quirky and silly. That's my personality. It might not be everybody's, but I tell you people still tell me today I've got that wooden nickel, you know, in the top door of my desk And so why not have fun with it? So and remember it can be a both

and Right, so Scott you, use the QR code and also say and you know what, i'm a visual person, so if you have a business card, i'd like that as well.

Janice Hostager: 21:55

Yeah, yeah, and I think that you're 100% right about business cards. They reflect your brand and your personality, and I have a lot of people that say, oh, i'd love your card and mine. I happen to be square, too, and a little larger, so they don't fit neatly in the stack, which I think is a benefit to a business card. But, like you, I like to have a visual reminder. I've got so many things going on and so many things on my phone that if I don't deal with it right away, I'm going to forget about it And it's just not going to happen. So one thing I've really found interesting is that I have been going to a networking event and I don't do a lot of them anymore because they really do eat up time And it's hard, so you have to be really choosy about what you say yes to and what you let go is a event here in Austin called the Table Network, and what I love about it is that they take each table and give them more in-depth questions. So people can. It's not just about what you do and you know, you know what you're all about your business. It's more about how do you feel about this thing, or how can we, how can we talk about unity today? How do you create unity in the workplace? And it's so interesting that what people say and that people open up and they really they're really thought provoking And I love that because you can get to know people really so much better Based on questions like that, versus just what do you do and you know stormy day today or whatever, you know your your opening line ends or whatever. How do you feel about how awkward would that be at a networking event? I'm just kind of thinking off the cuff here. You know, is that something that you've done in networking events where you kind of ask more in-depth questions like that?

Christine Clifton: 23:55

That's where I tend to go anyway, because I'm that deeper interested person. So I rarely will ask that surface question. It's just. It's just who I am. But I love that format. I attended a meeting that was similar to that And we had the general meeting that worked beforehand. Everybody sat down at a table and then there were questions, you know, among the table. And for me again, I think it comes down to behavioral style. In my book you don't have to shout to stand out. You know I wrote a book about networking conversations. I help people understand different styles of people And we and I kind of lean on the relational side of behavioral styles. There are people who are on the rational side of behavioral styles And so so it's important to honor who you are and what you need and want, but also recognize that not everybody might need or want that, And so when you're, when you're networking, you don't necessarily know who's across from you, especially if you're not going a little deeper in the conversation. So I think those sub activities where you're around the table and getting a little deeper, do give you that insight to the person that you and I are probably looking for. You know, to know, to know more about the person And I think it's beneficial to to have that, that connection. You know, I think, like my position statement earlier, we're going to have to continue to have conversations with each other. You know, we've got AI, we've got chat, whatever GPT I don't even know all the letters, but we're still in business, going to have humans talking to other humans. So, so I, I feel like I call myself analog in a digital world, it's like I'm the one who has. You know, some people are

getting ready for the apocalypse and in their basement they have, like all you know, the tools to make their own fire. Right, Because?

Janice Hostager: 25:54

they don't want to depend on not having an electric stove right.

Christine Clifton: 25:57

Yeah, so I'm kind of that person with, with, you know, with business and marketing, like I'm going to have these rudimentary tools that work really well, because these other ones, you know, aren't necessarily going to be the go to or the bomb or meet everybody's expectations. So I always say I'm the analog gal, so it's just, it's just not my jam to do all that digital stuff.

Janice Hostager: 26:19

Yeah, yeah. Well, you know, I think that was a really good point that you made that some people would really love that. Other people like me think about my husband. He would hate that kind of a networking event. He's more of a speed network guy, you know, and I think maybe and it does, now that I think about it there's a lot of women in that networking group each month and I'm wondering if maybe women tend to be more relational. I wonder if that's what's happening there, that's just drawing more of those.

Christine Clifton: 26:50

But I definitely find that in my practice that women tend to be more on the relational side.

Janice Hostager: 26:56

Yeah, Right, right, yeah, which is just, you know, a benefit that women have honestly, I think, in business, and I think we can use that to our benefit, for sure, sure. So I think of networking as well. First of all, networking as a marketing tool is not something we hear a lot about. I mean, obviously it will, mostly for B2B, and I think of it, and people that are familiar with my programs or my students will know that I have what is called the trail to the sale and it starts with the awareness stage And I think of people, I think of networking, oftentimes in that awareness stage only. But do you think that there's a place for networking in the consideration stage, in the compare stage, in the evaluation stage, in the sale stage, in the follow up stage? I mean there's a lot of stages to a marketing process.

Christine Clifton: 27:51

Sure, sure. I definitely think it plays a role. I like you, thank you I. I'm very discerning about where I go networking and how I call it ROTI return on time investment. Am I getting the return on time? I want my conversion rate from networking to either one-on-ones or sales conversations or whatever the ecosystem is that I've set up for that. I want a high conversion rate And so using networking if you're that person who likes face to face and that's your jam. One of my clients didn't like networking at all. Very much an introvert. Her business was a year and a half in when she found me just wasn't working like she thought. So after a couple of years went by as we were growing your business and getting her more clued in, we decided to start a VIP networking event as part of her ecosystem. Her business was a fractional CFO practice and



she had certain people she wanted to meet at a certain level. You know, solopreneurs are not her people. And so she started having regular events where she invited people to. So she went out general networking, met people who she felt might be kindred spirits and good referral sources. That was another thing that was big for her, in addition to looking for the actual right potential client. So she could just specifically invite people and then she knew who was there. It was a smaller group. People could get more familiar. Sometimes she might have a speaker other times not. So yeah, she, you know she dropped that a little further down the line in your process, so it can be used at any stage and it could be even a lunch. One of my clients who was more introverted she didn't necessarily want to have one on one with people because again time ROTI. So what she had was every first Friday she reserved a table at her business club. You know they have those business clubs that are like in restaurants or have restaurants for a table for four and her goal the month prior was to fill three seats. So because one of the seats were hers and the other three were people that she really wanted to get to know better and she'd invite them to lunch. So that's another way that you can bridge people. Again, it's pairing who she is as a person, how she likes to meet people and in an environment that she's going to shine. I'm one client who hated networking and her first point on her ecosystem was teaching classes, so she'd offer a free class or a meditation. She was an energy worker and that's because you want, when you're comfortable, you're going to show up confident and people are going to feel you when you're not confident or you're uncertain. It doesn't mean you're going to do that forever. And like the client I mentioned, the fractional CFO, she grew her skills quite a bit and then she became known as, like the networking maven you know in her area, where before she hated it. So you know it's important to honor who you are now and leverage the strengths you have now and it might turn into something different in the future, or you might find that this is the ecosystem starter. That's really the best one for you.

Janice Hostager: 31:33

Oh, I love, I really love that idea about the VIP network. I think you're absolutely right. You don't have to wait for somebody else to create an event. You can just go plan one yourself and then you have full control over it. So, if you want, if you want those higher level executives everybody likes to be invited to a VIP event right, yeah, absolutely. So. That's a brilliant idea. Yeah, yeah, so how can people find out more about you and that in your book you said you have and, and your business itself. Thank you for that.

Christine Clifton: 32:04

Yes, the website. My website is absolutely the portal to everywhere else I show up and my website is [christenclifton.com](http://christenclifton.com) and that's C-H-R-I-S-T-I-N-E, c-l-i-f-t-o-n.com. I have a free resources tab there on my page. I believe in making things accessible, so there's links to training and there's a free ebook there. And, yeah, I have a I'm putting, I've put together what I call the heart of networking freebie bundle for your listeners. Awesome, yeah, and they can grab that at [noshoutstandout.com](http://noshoutstandout.com) and they can just put in their info and they'll get sent to those freebies. There is a fruitful one-on-one worksheet. So how do you have a fruitful one-on-one? The other thing is a networking assessment. So you're taking a look at your plan, if you have one, and what you're doing now and what you might want to do in the future. And then I actually have training called the heart of networking. That was on PowerPoint, so I converted that to a

PDF for your listeners. It's not audio, but the PDF is very self-explanatory So it will take them through some additional information on the topics that we've covered. And then my book is in my shop, on my website as well.

Janice Hostager: 33:32

And that's a wrap. You can find the links for everything we talked about today, including Christine's networking bundle, in our show notes at [myweeklymarketing.com](http://myweeklymarketing.com) Board, slash 15. Do you love networking or do you dread it? Let me know by joining in the conversation on my Instagram page, which is at Janice Hostager Marketing, and if you know somebody who would like to learn more about networking, I'd be honored if you share this episode with them too. Thanks for joining me today. See you next time. Bye for now.