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Expert: Networking is key to get ahead in tough economy

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Motivational speaker Ari Kaplan, who has written dozens of articles on networking, business development and law matters, says people need to do go further than just collecting business cards to get ahead professionally in tough economic circumstances.

"Collecting business cards is not enough. You need to establish a connection and have leverage technology to follow up. Meeting somebody is just the first step, but keeping in touch with them is the real key," said Kaplan, who is on the island this week to speak at the National Association for Law Placement's annual conference taking place at the Caribe Hilton hotel.

Technology allows you to follow up, connect to someone through social media, like Facebook, Twitter and Blogs. For many people, finding contacts and looking for ideas that will help them get further, might be a struggle during these tough economic times, but practicing networking can make a difference in the kind of business relationship to be established. In a down economic market, individuals are more inclined to meet one another, said Kaplan. Effective strategies also consist of being honest, sincere and genuine, he told the Daily Sun in an interview Wednesday. "I talk about making friends, not contacts. These strategies are not only for lawyers, it's universally applicable," he mentioned. "I offer creative

ideas to meet individuals that people would like to meet and follow up and stay connected so it yields an opportunity in the future."

For Kaplan, relationships and networking do not necessarily have to deal with business all the time. For example, it's not a surprise that people who play golf together, end up doing business together. They don't just talk about business, but about the family and the game. "The authenticity allows people to get to know each other better. People think of networking as collecting cards or linking with each other, but it's about using the right tools to keep in contact with each other. These tools will give more information about a person," he added.

Kaplan, who has written some 125 articles for different stateside publications and a best-selling book, "The Opportunity Maker: Strategies for inspiring your legal career through creative networking and business development," is a coach, lecturer and ghostwriter for legal clients.

"I feel very lucky to do what I do because I am delivering a very important message of empowerment in a fairly negative climate nationwide, difficult market for professionals and students. No one is really immune to the change in the economy," he said.

Despite the economic situation on the island and worldwide, there are opportunities, but these might not be obtained through traditional channels, he said.

"People need to seek out opportunities proactively. We as a community wait for things, wait for the phone to ring, but the only way it will ring is if you call first," he concluded.

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