

Involvement is key in business groups

By: Danet Linares, Blanca Commercial Real Estate



Joining a professional organization is not a novel concept for most. But as deal flow slows and phones stop ringing, these outlets have become critical for many who are finding it more difficult to stay connected with other members of the business community. It's akin to a college athlete whose exercise regimen is no longer a part their daily routine post-graduation, forcing them - perhaps for the first time in years - to put effort into staying fit.

This void of built-in interaction underscores the critical role that professional organizations can play in today's market. Many of us have experienced a slowdown in business; meanwhile these organizations are enjoying a new life as conduits for communication and, in turn, are serving as catalysts for bringing deals to the table. In many ways, these groups have become lifelines to the business community for professionals across a range of industries.

But while the role of professional organizations has taken on new significance in today's stalled business climate, a distinction must be drawn between attending and getting involved. The fact is, while attending events with your peers is critical to maintaining a presence in the business community and keeping up with industry trends, unless you're actively participating in the organization, you're not capitalizing on the opportunity to build new relationships and open doors to new business.

Taking on a leadership role in an organization is a great way to show-off your abilities and business prowess to a larger audience of your peers. Whether you help drive fundraising, assist with budget planning, or help recruit new members or sponsors, getting involved means putting your business skills to work to strengthen the organization.

The bottom line is this: potential clients are far more likely to conduct business with those who demonstrate an appetite for involvement and an ability to lead. Stepping into a leadership position with CREW poised me to work closely with other members in a way that led to frequent business referrals, which I would not have received if I was just "showing up for lunch."

Exchanging business cards and sharing a cocktail are an important part of generating new business, but there's no substitute for rolling up the sleeves and getting to work on the way to accomplishing a common goal.

A silver lining of the current financial crisis is that many of us have more time available to spend on furthering our professional development and strengthening our relationships. Focus your efforts on cultivating new business using the resources already at your disposal - rather than reinventing the wheel - and prime yourself for growth once the storm clouds clear.

Danet Linares is the executive vice president of Blanca Commercial Real Estate and president of CREW-Miami (Commercial Real Estate Women), which is engaged in an ongoing campaign "Getting Back to Basics" to encourage industry professionals to revisit the fundamentals of business success.