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## Getting the most out of your CoreNet Global experience

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In 1987, I attended my very first CoreNet Global Summit - back then it was called the International Development Research Council (IDRC) World Congress. Of course, other things were different then, too. Ronald Reagan was President of the United States, a gallon of gasoline cost 95 cents, and George Michael's "Faith" was the No. 1 song in the country. I wore skinny ties and weighed about fifty pounds less than I do now.

Since my very first meeting in Hilton Head, South Carolina, I have not missed a single Summit or World Congress - almost 40 consecutive events. I've been all over North America - New York, Orlando, Seattle, San Diego, Dallas, Chicago, and Toronto - and even have attended some events in Europe. I have attended countless social functions - from a margarita making demonstration in San Antonio to the re-opening of the Russian Tea Room in New York City to dinner in an impeccably restored rowing house on the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia - and, crucially, have used all these events to establish and build key relationships that today form the core of my firms' consulting business.

The first way to ensure that I'll have a successful Summit is to attend! Well before each of the Summits I have attended, I have blocked out the dates on my calendar as soon as they are announced. During more organized periods of my life, I've blocked the dates out two years in advance. Such is the case for the upcoming meeting in Denver as well as this fall's meeting in Atlanta, my backyard. These have been on my calendar for a long while.

Once I receive the Summit schedule and list of attendees, I review them carefully. I don't mean that I give the schedule and attendee list a cursory review - I scrutinize the list and determine who I want to meet, which new relationships I want to form, and which old relationships I would like to continue to build.

Upon arriving at the Summit, I treat it like a work-related event. I don't go into a Summit expecting a vacation, no matter how exciting the location. This type of networking requires a lot of stamina and effort, and, based on my past experiences, I've actually found myself exhausted once I return and in need of an actual vacation.

At the Summits, I arrange my schedule to go to as many seminars as possible and take advantage of the coffee breaks and other stopping points to approach the contacts I have previously identified. While it is important to build new relationships, I never forget to take the time to nurture the old ones as well.

I don't eat alone. I don't think I have ever ordered room service at one of these meetings. As hard as it might be to approach a stranger, I try and be strategic about who I approach and try to find some common ground - either personally or professionally. I am sure to attend the myriad social events, which include plenty of time for networking.

While both new and existing contacts, I avoid discussing business unless he or she brings it up.

Instead I focus my time on learning about the people, their interests outside of work, their passions, their family, their philosophy. One of the benefits of running your own business is being able to be selective about who you work with - and I really try and work with people who I want to do business with.

I respect people's privacy - and never ever call them in their hotel rooms. I can tell you that I have personally heard of many attendees who truly felt violated by getting phone calls in their rooms from people pitching business. In sum, I use my time at the Summits to build relationships, and save the serious business conversations until after the event.

And again, I make it a point to stay for the entire Summit. Many people show up, shake a few hands, squeeze in a round of golf and fly back. Sure, we're all busy - but this is a prime opportunity to meet people in the business and form relationships that could be important to your business, even many years down the road.

For example, I was recently approached by a corporate client with whom I have a sixteen-year relationship through CoreNet Global. Over those sixteen years, we had never done any business together - none at all - but she called me about six months ago to work with her on an upcoming project. Through CoreNet Global we got to know each other, trust each other, and realize we have the same set of values. We learned of each other's reputations and business practices. Sixteen years is a long time to build a business relationship, but sometimes, that is what it takes. And, even if we never did business together, at least I would have had the opportunity to make a new friend.

CoreNet Global is large, and can be overwhelming. I believe that with all things in life, if you give generously, you will reap rewards. Getting involved with the organization beyond the Summit, whether it's through a committee, a local chapter, or the board - on which I was fortunate to serve for many years - increases networking opportunities.

My work does not end when the Summit is over. Rather than send a mass e-mail to everyone I met with, sometimes I take the time to write a personal note to people I met - both new and old.

Business today is about relationships. In my career, I have been involved in several different areas of this business. From the economic development side to running a practice at a Big Four firm to the consulting firm I now own - relationships have been the most important part of my business, and many of those relationships have been formed at CoreNet Global through the years. In fact, our firm's client portfolio is composed of many contacts I first encountered at CoreNet Global.

If you are new or old to the CoreNet Global scene, I truly encourage you to take a fresh look to the Summit experience. Try to work on building relationships - rather than going in with a "... have to make a deal" approach. Try and work, rather than use the Summit as an opportunity to take a work-paid vacation. Some things - hairstyles, gas prices, musical tastes, U.S. Presidents - have changed dramatically while I have been running up my streak of consecutive CoreNet Global Summits over the past 20 years. But one thing is constant - these events remain the best opportunities to strike meaningful relationships that will enrich your lives and your business.

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