

Grown Up Guide to Work- Are Business Cards Important?

By Joanne Denssion, MEd, CMP

Business cards play a role in our work life, and in the past few weeks I have been exposed to some interesting thinking about them.

I believe many of us, as we were working our way to our Grown Up Life, saw getting our own business cards as a sign that we had made it. The scene that comes to mind is Steve Martin running down the street screaming “I’m Somebody!!!” because he saw his name in print in the phone book (the movie is “The Jerk” since I am sure some of you reading this may not have seen it.)

I remember getting my first ones. Gold and Green ink—raised or embossed or something like that. “Assistant Director of Student Activities and the College Center”. It was a big deal—I’m pretty sure I mailed one to each of my parents.

Granted this is before we could send a text, beam from our Palm Pilot or, as someone did the other day, send me a scan of their card from their phone. No matter how you send it, I believe business cards are something you need for work for almost every job there is. You pass them out at business functions, personal get-togethers, and drop them in drawings for free food and prizes. You learn (hopefully) how to hand them out correctly, and how to handle those that are given to you, respectfully. You follow up on them and add them to your contacts to build your network for you, and for who you represent. You spread the brand of the organization you work for.

People who receive them know who you are, what you do and why they would want to do business with you. Are you in business development? Will you be their key contact on a project? How can you help them? It’s more than your name, company, email and phones---it says what you do and possibly your credentials, to show why you are qualified to do so.

Recently in the period of one week, because of what was shared with me, I thought about business cards a lot. These three situations happened.

Person one achieved a certification in their field and related very directly to their position in their organization. The organization helped support them getting the certification which is very hard, time consuming and was an investment of a couple of thousand dollars. It was very important to the employee. Right before they earned it they had received a promotion, with a significant title change. They were told if they had not gotten the promotion and title change, business cards would not have been reprinted, “just” because of the certification.

The second person also earned a certification, in their field, that was on their performance goals for the year. The organization also backed them financially to reach their goal. When they earned it they too were also told that it was too expensive to print new business cards.

The third person, a business development representative from a start up company, I met at an event where they were a sponsor and showcasing their new products. When I asked for a business card he told me he did not have one even though he had worked for the company for 6 weeks ---and they were obviously sending him on the road to sell. The irony is the product was for connecting people.

The first two felt very let down and frustrated by their organizations. The third was embarrassed and I am sure also felt somewhat let down by the company.

Newsflash---business cards are not the laborious, expensive task they were years ago. Yes, I do remember having to have them laid out, proofed, changed, proofed and wait days, sometimes weeks to get them. If they were more than one color ink---both price and time went up significantly. Overnight shipping was not as accessible or affordable either. It appears someone in these organizations has not gotten this out of their head. Although I realize not every organization can, or should, run down to the nearest office supply store and have them printed (I don't either). Professional printers can now do incredible things, in a very short period of time, due to new technology, just like everywhere else in the work world. The cost of "4 color" printing is a fraction of what it was. I realize in some very large organizations where brand is being highly protected and they can only be printed one place, the speed and cost are still a non- issue--- unless you make it one.

And what happens to employee morale---or "employee engagement" that everyone talks about, when they are told that their accomplishments are not "worth" new cards? Or a new employee is told they are not worth new cards?

And one more thought: Business Cards are made to give out. Don't hoard them. If you do that they really will be wasted when something changes, and the almost full box has to be tossed.