



# Needham Times

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## Ten things I've learned about the value of the Chamber

Recently I was networking with some colleagues, and they asked me what I thought of the Newton-Needham Chamber. This type of question usually means, "Are you getting any business?" or "Is it worth the membership fee?" For the last few months I, too, won-

a mover, a jewelry appraiser, a website developer, a commercial real estate finance broker, or any other profession? I know someone. I'm a resource to my customers, as well as having resources should I need them personally.

• Best practices and problem solving. We have so much in common with other people in the Chamber. No matter your business there is someone who has struggled with the same types of issues with which you struggle. We're all looking to find customers, grow our businesses, find marketing ideas, etc... There is a wealth of knowledge out there - people who can give you marketing ideas, website ideas, or share other solutions.

• Networking. Of course this is one of the main aspects of the Chamber and there are plenty of opportunities to mingle in the morning, afternoon, or evening. Remember that you get what you put into it, so if you only attend a few events every now and then, people won't get to know you. It is rare to get a referral from a stranger, so don't be a stranger! Come to events, join in and get to know some people. (Are you new to the Chamber or maybe a little shy? Every event has a few people whose job it is to make you feel at home and introduce you to people. Look for the Ambassadors - they're the hosts of the party!)

• Sales revenue. Not to be forgotten and surely one of the most important aspects. Because relationships drive revenue the sales won't happen right away. You need to form some bonds with people - get to know them and earn their trust. Once people

know you a bit, then they'll feel comfortable using your services or referring you to their customers. Personally, I've seen more than a 10-fold return on my initial investment, but it didn't come right away. (Expect to begin getting some business around nine months to a year - it doesn't always take this long, but it won't be instantaneous. Remember that relationships take time to build and that joining the Chamber is one of the many activities you should do to develop business.)

• Business counseling. Last year when faced with a difficult business decision, I turned to SCORE which is an organization that provides business advice in a number of areas. (SCORE has a representative in the Chamber.) They helped me understand and design a solution to my problem. I got so much from my meeting that I have continued to meet with them on occasion. They provide solid advice, keep me accountable, and help me brainstorm when needed - they are both cheerleaders and advisors.

• Partnerships. You never know who you might meet who would be a good fit for your business. Maybe you could subcontract pieces of projects so that you can handle more projects while still providing stellar service to your customers. I've met some great people who help me provide a broader range of services than what I could provide on my own.

• Opportunities to Trade Services. Do you need something? Can you provide something? I recently traded some of my time-management services with a massage therapist. It was a win-win

situation, and I developed a friendship as well. Trading isn't for everyone, but it's an option for some.

• Friends and social outings. Ever feel a little isolated in your office? Miss having a group of colleagues to chat with about the game? Don't overlook the importance of friendships and social interactions within the Chamber. I've made lots of friends now and feel like I belong. There's something to be said for this level of comfort.

• Volunteer opportunities. This works well for both you and the Chamber. You get to know members, (i.e. form relationships) all while helping out. I'm a member of the Ambassador Committee, as well as working several individual events. This type of interaction allows me to get to know more people in different situations. The Chamber has many events, as well as over 10 committees, where they need assistance. The level of commitment varies, so there is probably an opportunity that can meet your available time.

What have you gained by being a member of the Chamber? You have probably gotten far more out of it than you realize. I know I have.

*Loanna Prime, Owner of Clearly Organized, teaches productivity and time-saving tips for organizations and individuals to help them save 1-2 hours every day. What could you do with an extra 1-2 hours? For more information, visit [www.ClearlyOrganizedLLC.com](http://www.ClearlyOrganizedLLC.com) or call 617-633-2199.*

### GUEST COLUMN

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dered if I should renew my membership. Was it really worth the time and effort? Was I getting something out of it? Was it a good fit for my company?

My initial response was, "No. I probably won't renew because I haven't gotten thousands of dollars worth of business." (Deep inside aren't we all thinking this?) But ask yourself, "Are sales the only measure of value?" As our group continued the discussion, I realized how much I had gotten from the Chamber - far more than I had initially realized. I had discounted my experience a little too quickly. I had forgotten about...

• Public relations opportunities. I've been interviewed on the radio four times and have published a regular column on organization and productivity in the In Business newspaper which is delivered to over 5,000 individuals and organizations in the area. This experience has given me confidence to pursue other PR opportunities in local newspapers and radio. And, yes, people have called me and said that they heard me on the radio or read one of my columns.

• List of resources. Do you need a trial attorney, a fitness instructor,