

## Connecting With the Business Community

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There are many opportunities for those in marriage education to work with the business community. Marriage education practitioners may want to partner with businesses to solicit monetary donations for program operations, in-kind donations or to incentivize participation (if their grant allows). Others would like to provide healthy marriage and relationship education services to a company's employees. Once you determine the purpose of your association with the company, you need to be able to communicate effectively with its leadership. The following provides some tips for connecting with corporate America.

### Get in the Door

Once you have identified who you want to partner with, develop a plan to get in the door. Use your personal and professional network to identify connections to the business community. If you do not have any in your current network, consider joining



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To help businesses learn about relationship education, (what it is and why it matters to your community) send information in advance of the meeting. Include program materials or letters of endorsement from professionals, community leaders and businesses.

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## The Initial Meeting

Do your homework for the appointment; be prepared and concise. Try to explain what you do in two sentences. Time is money and you are there to sell your program and yourself. The questions that must be answered within the first two minutes are:

*“What does this have to do with me and my company?”*

Know the company’s mission statement, learn about current ways in which the business is supporting the community, talk to employees, shop, eat at, or visit the business, and learn about their competitors. Discern which industries have the highest divorce rates and share that information. Be aware of the company’s employee turnover rates, the lack of or presence of a company wellness program and if they have a below-average benefits package. Be prepared to overcome objections by having responses ready for each protest. Recognize that not everyone knows why marriage matters - even though they live it every day - and make a convincing case for it.

*“How will we benefit from this?”*

The strongest information you can provide a company is the effect the program will have on their long term profitability. For example, according to recent research, healthy marriages are good for employers as well as employees. Employees in successful, stable and healthier relationships increase profits for their employers because they tend

to be committed, dependable and motivated. Conversely, employees in failing relationships tend to cost employers money in lost productivity and profits.

The company can also benefit from being associated with your

program if they support it financially or through in-kind donations. Have a plan for the placement of their logo or company name as a sponsor on your marketing materials.

Remember, you are there to give, not just receive, so provide information and potential solutions. Here are some tips for making the most of your meeting:

- 1) Know the desired outcome for each meeting.
- 2) Believe in what you are doing (but don’t be overzealous). People are drawn to passion and your enthusiasm will be contagious.
- 3) Recognize the individual and corporate value system and choose language accordingly.
- 4) Have answers prepared to possible questions.
- 5) Ask questions. Listen. Gather Information.
- 6) Look around the room for pictures and awards and acknowledge their achievements.
- 7) Let them tell their story or that of someone they know.
- 8) Tell the story of your marriage program (How – Why – Who).
- 9) Share gains of other businesses and class participants. Share the benefits for their organization.
- 10) Meet their needs by being flexible and personalizing a program for their company.

Just like you teach in relationship education, nurture your business partnership. Always be willing to return favors. Create situations for businesses to be thanked by individuals benefiting from the program.

## Follow-Up

Establish a follow-up plan before you leave the meeting. Set clear goals for next steps and take action. Communicate follow-up steps in writing so that both parties can review and agree on the partnership.

Just like you teach in relationship education, nurture your business partnership. Always be willing to return favors. Create recognition through awards, thank you notes, events, letters to editors commending the business' contribution to the community, and submit a press release to inform the media of your partner's investment in your program. Create situations for businesses to be thanked by individuals benefiting from the program.

A partnership with the business community can be diverse. No matter what type of relationship you wish to establish, it is important to be strategic in deciding who you wish to partner with and in networking with corporate decision-makers. In your first meeting, be prepared to establish what you can do for the company and how the company will benefit. Remember to follow-up and nurture your corporate partnerships.

## Additional Resources

Marriage and Family Wellness: Corporate America's Business?

[http://www.marriagecomission.com/files/May31ReportCopy\[1\]\(1\).pdf](http://www.marriagecomission.com/files/May31ReportCopy[1](1).pdf)

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*This is a product of the NHMRC, led by co-directors Mary Myrick, APR, and Jeanette Hercik, Ph.D., and project manager, Patrick Patterson, MSW, MPH.*