

How to work the room like a pro

There are definite trade secrets to successful networking. It really amounts to being confident, friendly and open, whilst remaining professional. Read our guide to get the whole crowd eating out the palm of your hand



Successful networking is all about knowing how to behave, learning the skill of emotional intelligence. Some people find networking so confronting they become horror-struck and try to hide. The secret is to start connecting more.

Preparation

Before you go to an event, visualise or write down any negative thought or statement you have about yourself and turn it into a positive. For example, "I won't know anyone," becomes "I will meet lots of new people." Think, "What have I got to lose?", "When am I going to start doing something about...?" Practise your handshake and self-intro. Think about repositioning your behavioural consciousness from invited guest to that of host. Consider what the event is: its purpose, the sponsor, location, people attending, and the reason for your participation. Then you can decide whether, or not, to go.

When there

- decide whether you want to make a grand or under-played entrance. Either way, walk into an event with an air of confidence that says you belong
- respond to conversations that include rudeness and non-relevant subjects, by quickly excusing yourself
- be perceived as powerful, not as in 'dominating', but as 'empowered' and in control of yourself
- have the confidence of 'chutzpah', a Yiddish word meaning shameless audacity, to be very 'out there'. This is about learning to come out of your shell

- recognise who to talk to and whom to avoid (like 'Mr Sleaze') – and how to avoid them
- prepare for small talk. A bore is actually someone who will not make small talk. You must talk – it creates energy, engagement; silence is not golden, it is the kiss of death
- make eye contact
- think of great opening lines
- spend 8-10 minutes with each person. Just say "excuse me" when you want to leave
- ask people, "Are you a member of this association/organisation/charity?"; and/or "Do you think I should get involved?"
- smile and say "Hello" or "Hi", not "Good evening" or "Pleased to meet you." This is interpreted as being pompous. Say things like, "Are you alone here?", "This is a beautiful facility," and "This is a wonderful charity"

Think of the benefits

You have fun, it is not a chore but a choice, you meet contacts, and get to create million-dollar roller decks of business cards. Changing your behaviour also has payoffs; by becoming more engaging, you generate more opportunities. You will establish common connections and rapport, fresh insights and new information. Good networking can increase your business and income, and career opportunities are also enhanced. Your comfort levels and self-confidence increase, and with new contacts and friends, it really can be enjoyable.

Avoid:

- do not drink too much, especially at Christmas – its consequences can destroy your career
- do not monopolise someone else's time
- do not overload your plate, particularly in a buffet setting
- do not attempt to eat, drink and talk all at the same time
- do not size up people, or their company, by their name tag
- do not be rude or patronising
- do not smoke, even outside. This is a negative subject, one you don't want to be drawn into. If you must smoke, do it discreetly
- do not sit down unless directed to
- avoid making comments such as "the food looks pathetic", "the venue was so hard to find". Create up-beat conversation, making unusual observations that attract people's interest
- flirting does happen but be cautious in the business environment; you do not want to inadvertently mislead your victim

Business cards

At any function you will be expected to have business cards – bring enough. You may get away with not having a card to give someone in return for theirs, but somewhere in his or her mind the exchange will be deemed unsatisfactory. Whilst your encounter has left a mark in their mind, you have still created a hurdle for yourself. Write notes about people that you have met: their name, a detail about them, and the conversation you

had, so you know what to say when you next speak. If you wish to give them a card, ask for their card first – to avoid giving the impression of being too pushy. Be mindful, and this applies particularly to women, that cards often have mobile number and address contacts. Only give out a business card if and when you have established a rapport. Pass out cards astutely but avoid presenting yourself as elitist. Do not pass out brochures – that is overload.

Nametags

Based on a US study, these are most effective when displayed on the top right of your body. The traditional handshake is right hand to right hand, with the eyes focusing in that direction. The recall rate is six times less with the nametag placed on the body's left. Say the other person's name, then repeat it back to yourself.

10 qualities of a top networker

1. follows up referrals; even drops them a line – puts their business card to use
2. has a positive attitude
3. looks trustworthy
4. well-presented
5. good listener
6. always seeks networking possibilities
7. thanks people
8. enjoys helping others
9. sincere
10. utilises the network ■

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