

10 Tips for Networking Success

network / nétwérk *n. & v.* a group of people who exchange information, contacts, and experience for professional or social purposes. (The Oxford Dictionary)

Networking does produce results. The more people know about you and your business, and the more they trust you, the greater the likelihood they will either work with you or refer someone else to you. Networking doesn't have to just be about business. Many great friendships have come out of networking opportunities. Networking can be a great way to find new suppliers, get connected to decision makers, find a new job, share ideas and information, advice, brainstorming, laughter and even meet a potential long term romantic partner.

1. Make a positive first impression. You have only one opportunity to make a great first impression. Here are some key factors that influence this initial impression: your handshake, facial expressions, eye contact, interest in, and attentiveness to the other person all create connections with others. Your appearance has a great deal to do with first impressions too – press your clothes, polish your shoes, everything is part of the package that makes you appear approachable and interesting to talk to. Develop a great handshake, approach people with a natural, genuine smile and make good eye contact.

Make eye contact with the person speaking to you, not others walking around. Listen carefully to their name. If you don't hear them or understand exactly what they say, ask them to repeat it.

2. Be courteous to everyone. Manners cost nothing so treat everyone as you would wish to be treated yourself. Aim for quality conversations. Build trust. From trust comes business opportunities. Treat everyone with respect, no matter what their rank is in a company. Don't disregard someone who doesn't seem to be of immediate 'use' to you. You never know who they know or how they might help you.

If you want to join a group's conversation, stand on the periphery. When someone nods your way, move in and introduce yourself. But don't change the conversation to suit your agenda.

Everyone is there to meet new people so don't be afraid of politely ending a conversation with someone and moving on to someone else – they won't be offended.

3. It's Not About You. Most people start with a networking group by looking for immediate gains for themselves. If that's why you are networking, it's for the wrong reasons.

Stephen Covey, author of "*7 Habits of Highly Effective People*" states, "Seek first to understand and then to be understood." Make a powerful impression - ask them what they do before talking about yourself or your business. Ask them to elaborate, or explain something in more detail. Listen intently to what they tell you. Once you have demonstrated interest in someone else, they will become more interested in you.

4. Ask open-ended questions and listen actively, to find out what aspect of your business they're most interested in. This means questions that ask who, what, where, when, and how as opposed to those that can be answered with a simple yes or no. This form of questioning opens up the discussion and shows listeners that you are interested in them.

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5. Listen for link words or phrases that connect you with the person. This could also be something you have in common. When you discover that you have something in common with another person, it becomes a totally different conversation and connection.

6. Provide an Instant Referral. Give the person you meet a connection to someone who matches what they are looking for - provide an instant, live referral. Never ask for anything, just make matches.

7. Be prepared to clearly state what you do. Prepare a memorable, but brief benefit statement/pitch for your products or services, and practice it, so you are not "ummming" and "ahhhing" when someone asks "what do you do?". Develop a 10-15 second introduction as well as a 30 second (elevator pitch) presentation. The introduction explains what you do and for whom. This introduction should encourage the other person to ask for more information. Make sure the message is unique and catchy so that it entices people to say "that's interesting...tell me more". When they do, use your thirty second presentation. Give an example of your work and the typical results you have help your clients achieve. Your introductions need to be well-rehearsed so you can recite them at any time anywhere. Be genuine, authentic.

8. The Business Card Exchange. When giving someone your business card, you may want to consider giving them two – one to keep and one to pass on. When you receive their business card, make a note on it about when and where you met and a reason to contact them. That way when you get back to your office you'll know why you have their card.

9. Follow up after the event. In my experience, most people drop the ball here. Yet the follow-up is the most important aspect of networking. Follow up after you've met. 80% of contacts are never followed up. Here are two ways to follow up:

1. immediately after the event – typically the next day. Mention something from your conversation and express your interest to keep in contact. Always include a business card in your correspondence.
2. Within 2 weeks, contact that person and arrange to meet for coffee or lunch. This will give you the opportunity to learn more about their business, the challenges they face, and how you could potentially help them. This is NOT a sales call – it is a relationship building meeting.

10. Thank them for the referral. You don't have to go overboard but a thank you can take you a long ways to building long term referrals and a strong network of people who believe in you and are willing to help.

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