

Top Tips for Networking Success

The following represent top tips for networking success. They are tried, tested and proven to deliver significant results and confidence improvement at all levels and in all sorts of business environments.....

Which ones would improve your performance?

1. Networking is NOT selling.....

Don't go to sell, go to see who you might build an initial relationship with? Networking is about identifying people who MAY have a common interest and the event should simply be the catalyst to setting up a meeting over a coffee at a later date.....

2. Before attending any networking event or meeting, make sure you are prepared.....

Ask yourself, do you know the format or structure of the event, who else is attending, what is expected of you, what will I have to do, if anything in the event in terms of speaking, meeting, presenting etc? All events have some structure or format and forewarned is forearmed.....

3. Most people are on some level, less than comfortable – This is good!

90% of people are not comfortable networking and meeting strangers, including, quite likely, you! The good news if you approach someone with a line like “do you mind if I join you” is that there is likely no chance of anything other than a positive response....

Fear of not breaking into groups or being left on your own is natural but unrealistic. Be positive and make the first move.....

4. Put other people at ease....

Don't dive straight into business. Ask about how they found the venue, parking, have they been here before, what brings them here, do they know many people etc.

When you have done some small talk about the venue, parking etc, ask them what they do and then get to a more business focus of the conversation, when both are relaxed.....



5. Don't get pre-judged by your "opening"

People make assumptions based on things like job titles – "I am a Solicitor, Accountant, Project Manager etc". If you introduce yourself by a job title, this can be the danger as they will already have an idea of what you are or do and you may be tarred with a brush that is not accurate.

Try introducing yourself by what you actually do for clients, rather than what your job title is – try, "I help my clients to make more money and be more successful", "I try to keep the rail network running and help to get people to work on time", "I am helping my clients to make the most of their assets in the current economic climate", etc.

Much more interesting and guaranteed to generate a response such as "how do you do that"? A great conversation starter.....

6. Use open questions to build a conversation.....

When engaging in conversation, take care to use open questions. Who, what, where, when, how, why all build conversation and cannot be answered with a clipped or simple yes or no.

Closed questions make for awkward silences and difficult engagement.....

7. Write it down – With permission!

When you have a business card from the other person (get it early when you are discussing the geography of where they work), keep hold of it in visible sight.

Putting it away in your pocket is dismissive and rude. Also, a business card can be a conversation prolonger when you see the address, other offices, brand positioning, mission statements etc.

If you have the card and someone makes a relevant or interesting comment, use the card to make a note of it, but only after asking permission. If you write on the card without permission, this is rude too!

8. Know the broader business agenda – Have an opinion.....

Don't be caught out not knowing what the wider business agenda is. Be well read so you can have an opinion on the current agenda. Check out www.thebusinessdesk.com for news headlines from across the region and don't be afraid to express an opinion.

Opinions are memorable and thought provoking.....



9. Don't get lumbered – Have a plan for moving around the room.....

Make sure you have a target for meeting people. Make sure that you meet this target by always being aware of the time you have spent with a person or group.

Networking conversations should be 10 minutes maximum before deciding to move on. Don't leave someone on their own for you to go networking elsewhere, it is rude.

Ask them if they wish to join you – they may decline, but that would be their choice and therefore not rude.

10. If networking over a formal lunch or dinner – take control

It is easy to talk only to those on either side of you. If you are sitting around a table, ask those around you if “this is one of those events where we all introduce ourselves”?

Get some momentum for that idea and then engage with the rest of the table to do just that.

When people do their introductions etc, if they are short, using name, rank, serial number only, ask a few questions so that when it is your turn, you can give it a decent shot without making the others look bad.

Better still, volunteer to go first as this will set a decent standard for others to follow and they will appreciate this. Make sure you come across as self deprecating “I don't mind, I have done a couple of these before and at least I will get it over with” rather than an aggressive little volunteer.

Wait for the clutter of drinks service, vegetarian service etc to be over before starting!

11. Where and when to network?

There are literally dozens of places to network. Check out the ones that meet your requirements.

Who goes, what seniority, what are they likely to be interested in, will I meet the right people?

Don't go unless you know it will be of value and even then, go twice to check out if this is a typical structure, before committing to anything.



12. The game plan.....

Have a game plan for your overall networking strategy, including;

- Arrive Early
- Plan to Stay a Little Later
- Be Prepared – Seating Plan / Delegate List
- Have a Focus
- Engage Help – The Event Organiser – They Will Introduce You.....
- Take Your Diary
- Switch Off Phone
- Better – Leave it in Car!
- Be Yourself
- Go For It.....

13. Finally.....

Go networking with an attitude of “how can I help” and business will come back many times over. If you go with the attitude of “what can I sell”, you will be seen as shallow and hard.....

Good Luck!

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