



THE TOP 5 TIPS FOR NETWORKING

It seems that everyone is doing or talking about networking these days.

The concept of Networking has now entered many areas of our work and personal lives from business breakfasts to speed dating. Whether you are employed by an organization or amongst the rising number of people in self-employment networking is an important and essential means of building a lasting business. It is not enough to deliver a great service or quality product hoping that offers and opportunities will come flooding in. Networking is about making connections with other people, in allied services and industries, and in seemingly non-business related contexts too.

5 Top Tips for Networking are:

1. Remember you are always with you

You take yourself wherever you go, so it helps to know your own strengths and address your weaknesses. If you have undertaken any psychometric tests or have appraisal feedback then consider these. You may find it helpful to create a mind map (see books on the subject on www.tonybuzan.com) to capture your qualities and expertise in the people skills arena as these are all transferable experiences.

It can also be helpful to ask a critical friend to provide you with feedback on your appearance – mannerisms, hair, clothes, (department stores offer free appointments with a personal shopper) so you can find the best help to create an appearance that is both comfortable for you and projects the impression you want to create. As 93% of communication is non-verbal – the low cut outfits on women, and Hawaiian shirts on men are best kept for beach holidays. Professional appearance that is smart casual has become more commonplace which means you do not necessarily have to wear a suit but an outfit that is reflective of your professional and

personal style. If you are not sure what to wear to an event, ask the organizers what the dress code is likely to be.

2. Make real connections

Running a business, irrespective of its size, is all about marketing – it’s about offering people what they want – not what you think they need. The same principles apply to networking. The only way you can find out what people want is to carefully listen to what the other person is saying. In overhearing some conversations, you may notice they can seem more like one person is delivering an infomercial rather than generating a genuine conversation. It is also unhelpful to attend an event with the sole thought of “*I must network!*” which is rather like a hunter going off to find food – although a single minded focus, it can be detected a mile off. These people are often looking over the shoulder of the person they are talking to wondering whether there is anyone else in the room they should target. The message that ends up being communicated is “*you are not worth my precious time*” – which is hardly conducive to establishing mutually sincere connections. Review the times you may have done this, or been on the receiving end – did that conversation generate anything for you other than undermining your confidence or disappointment?

How you communicate with others is pivotal, and if you tend to think only about your own story, or mastering a formulaic process you are not present and this will be detected. To establish rapport requires congruence, attentiveness and active listening – which includes asking open questions and waiting to hear an answer; rather than rushing in to fill the space with your own agenda. Relationships are formed when we create a dialogue not just deliver a monologue. On the basis of what you hear, you might recall some nugget that could be useful to the other person; and it might not necessarily mean it is your business services. When you do this you add value for the other person and he or she becomes well-disposed towards you and is more likely to think about you as and when work comes up that could use your specific skills.

3. Get into a great frame of mind

Preparing your mind-set before walking into an event is essential. If butterflies of anxiety are fluttering, try taking Bach Rescue Remedy a few minutes beforehand www.bachremedies.com .

Set yourself a goal such as:

- enjoying the event

- meeting at least three new people
- learning something new
- exchanging ideas and cards
- discovering a potential opportunity

Optimism and engagement creates a demeanour that is welcoming, gives the impression that you are both interested in what is being said as well as being an interesting person yourself.

Before you enter the event, think supportive thoughts such as *“I feel great, and will have great conversations today”*, stand up straight, put a smile on your face, take a few deep breaths and walk in. When you register, ask if there is a delegate list, so you can review who is there and decide who you would like to meet. If there isn't a list, ask registration if they know of anyone who is working in your area of expertise. If you have a name it helps you feel more confident in approaching that person. Don't wait for people to talk to you but rather initiate conversations. Simple questions can be great openers to creating a conversation such as

- *“How are you enjoying the event?”*
- *“What were you hoping to learn from today?”*

- *“I found the previous session really interesting what did you think?”*

Notice they are all open questions – using open questions (questions that use *what, where, how, when* and *why* in them) means you have taken your first steps in making a connection with someone else.

4. Creating the future

When you are nervous you may find you want to stay glued to the side of the first person you speak to. However, this limits your opportunities as well as the other person so invite others to join you, and when you take your leave, it is okay to acknowledge that it’ll be good for you each to have time to meet other attendees.

Before you move on, exchange business cards and make a note on the back of the card you receive as to the context of the contact and/or any actions required such as to send further information. It is helpful to get in touch by email shortly after the event. Your email could simply say

“It was really good to meet you at the xxxx event, which was such an informative evening. If you have time, I would welcome your thoughts on my website/this article/this event/speaker etc.

Include a piece of new information that might be useful to that person, on the basis of your earlier discussions. If the person is a new contact, close your email with a statement such as, *I look forward to hearing from you.* Make sure you reply to any emails you receive, it is the polite thing to do!

The secret to great networking is establishing relationships that have a genuine mutual regard. Quite simply if we do not build relationships we will not build our reputation or our business. Be honest now, would you recommend someone you did not feel you had a rapport with? True, some people you will resonate with, and some you won't - but reluctance to taking the first step just stops you moving forward and finding out where the areas of mutual interest and help might be.

A major mistake many people make is that they think networking is about getting something from others. It is not. It is about **giving** something to others. And to do that, you must sustain relationships with a spirit of generosity. Follow through on any offers you make to help someone; acknowledge people for any assistance they give you. Keep the

relationship warm with email information that might be of interest. Meet for coffee. Be yourself and be honest – people can sense a fraud a mile off.

5. Getting involved

Evaluate where your potential networks might be whether through your work, education or leisure activities. Widen your interests and you widen your opportunities to connect with a broader range of people so think about the types of events that will provide you with such opportunities.

Many professional and recreational membership organizations depend on the voluntary efforts of their membership. Becoming involved as a volunteer with your professional body, specialist interest forum or leisure pursuits group is a great way to meet people while contributing to the organisation's growth, as well as your own. Depending on your areas of expertise and what is needed at any one time (and that changes so don't lose heart if there are no initial openings), there are endless opportunities to join a committee, speak at events, participate in organizing functions, writing articles, initiating new projects, joining forums. Whatever your contribution, remember it does make a difference to that organization.

But if you do sign up to a committee – make sure it not just a CV

enhancing move, but a genuine commitment that you are in a position to fulfil.

Over the years, I've been on Boards, Committees and hosted countless events, meeting many wonderful people. I've stayed in touch with some, not all; but now with the advent of email there really is no excuse for any of us not to maintain links in some way. Occasionally I'll hear from someone out of the blue, who reminds me where we met, and asks if I can be of some assistance in some way. If I can, I do. And if for some reason, the answer is a friendly no, I will try my best to offer another suggestion. I work to the adage "*what goes around, comes around*" – and if we do not create genuine connections, then we are missing the point. And finally, always remember to say thank you. It goes a long way.

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Visit www.associationforcoaching.com to find the details of a coach who can help you improve your networking skills.

If you have found this self-help guide helpful then please let us know by emailing media@associationforcoaching.com

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