

Our Tips for Networking

By Nancy Brennan and Michael Samuels

Here are a few tips that you may consider when networking:

- **Focus on benefiting others and don't worry about how you will benefit.**
Networking is about meeting people, establishing mutually beneficial connections, and building relationships. Set out with the mindset of being an asset to others with the possibility of benefits eventually finding their way back to you. The more people that you get to know, the more opportunities that may be presented to you.
- **Prepare a 10 second elevator speech.**
Have a memorable 10 second elevator speech prepared, which briefly describes your business and how you and your business are a valuable resource for other businesses. You should also be prepared to very briefly respond to questions about what your business priorities and objectives are and how others may help you.
- **Make listening a priority.**
First and foremost, be a great listener. People may tend to feel more comfortable talking about themselves, so ask open ended questions to educate yourself about your contact's business, including, how he or she got started. By doing this, you will leave a very positive impression and learn important information that may enable you to advance a relationship. After all, you want your contacts to remember you favorably.
- **Select networking groups that have a supportive membership.**
Go to networking events where people are not competing with the same services as you are for the same clients. Business networking groups are best where there are exchanges of information, ideas, and support.
- **Pay special attention to how you present yourself.**
Your first impression within the first few seconds of meeting someone is important. Remember the cliché that you can never make a "second" first impression. Let your body language reflect your good qualities. Develop a firm handshake, approach a person with a genuine smile, and make good eye contact. Always repeat the other person's name, even if you have to ask for it again.
- **Plan to use your time wisely and selectively.**
Go with a general game plan as to how many people you want to meet and how much time you want to allocate to get to know someone for the purpose of initiating a relationship. Use your time wisely and focus on the quality of the connections you make, not the quantity. Be flexible to allow yourself to spend more time with people you feel comfortable with and have the potential for building a genuine connection.

- **Have a selection of conversation generators or icebreakers on hand.**
Prepare topics or little stories of general interest that you may utilize as “small talk” to break the ice. But, more importantly, be natural and your true self will come out.
- **Take a soft approach in making connections.**
Allow time to nurture relationships so that they develop naturally. Don’t try to force them by coming on with a hard sell.
- **Demonstrate a service orientation.**
Make it your goal to be a benefit to others so you become appreciated as a giver. Learn about your contact’s challenges and offer to help in some way. Afterwards, jot down notes on the back of his or her business card to help you remember what referrals would be appropriate or what type of information would be useful to this person. Being responsive builds trust and credibility.
- **Make sure contact information is exchanged**
Ask for the other person’s card at the end of your conversation and offer yours only if you believe that there is potential for further discussions or meetings. You don’t want to waste anyone’s time or your time. Make certain that the other person has your current contact information so he or she can reach you.
- **Follow-up with the contacts you made as soon as possible**
While, it may be helpful to be responsive within 2 business days, you should send a timely follow-up personal note or email to each person you spoke with. Include your business card or contact information and express your pleasure at having met the person at the specified event. Offer to be of help in any way you can. Think of ways to stay in touch regularly (e.g. share an article of interest) because repeated contacts are important to building relationships.
- **Be true to yourself and genuine to others.**

While, you want to make a good first impression, be flexible with each person that you meet. You don’t want to be a robot spewing out information, but rather a warm, genuine person, who is trustworthy and would be a valuable business contact and connection. Be the type of person that you yourself would want to meet.