



The Art of Networking



How to make
meaningful connections
and enjoy the experience
of networking events.

Many of us feel daunted at the idea of entering a room full of people we don't know. We worry about getting stuck with one person or, even worse, being left alone completely. All too often we can find ourselves heading for the bar, pretending to check our mobile. And it can feel just as awkward online in a group Zoom call. But with some tried and tested strategies, and different ways of thinking, I promise we can all come to look forward to these events!

Here are my Top Networking Tips

What is networking?

- An opportunity to meet new people.
- It's not about selling yourself.
- It's about making connections.
- And if you connect well with someone, and you follow up later, that's good. If not, you've had a nice chat anyway.
- It's a chance to add to your wider advisory group.
- And it should be enjoyable!

1. Before the event

- Find some space to be quiet or listen to your favourite music.
- Breathe in and out of your lower stomach - in for a count of three, out for a count of three. Do this three times.
- Wear something that makes you feel good.
- Wear an unusual accessory. It can make it easy for others to speak to you.
- Think of something you're happy to talk about, like a recent book or a film.
- Actively look out for something interesting beforehand, like a newspaper article or a radio item, that you can discuss at the event.
- Think of a couple of questions you could ask to keep the conversation flowing.
- If you're at a reception after hearing a speaker, actively try to remember a point that the speaker made so that you can discuss it afterwards.
- Try practicing introducing yourself in a fun way.

2. Entering the room

- Remember to smile – it will look like you want to be there.
- Before you pick up your drink, look around the room for someone on their own.
- Collect your drink, then without hesitation, go straight up to someone and say hello.
- If there's no-one on their own, join a group or stay near the drinks, so you can see the next single person arriving.
- Try to avoid taking your phone out, pretending to check your texts.
- If you feel a bit stressed during the event, it's OK to step outside for a minute or two – perhaps get some fresh air. This can help you to relax and recharge for your second wind.

3. Introducing yourself

- Say your name clearly to make it easy for people to remember you.
- Think of different ways of saying what you do. For example, Rather than saying, 'I work for Coca Cola', perhaps you could say, "I'm in fizzy drinks." Instead of, "I'm a banker", you might say, "I approve loans so that companies can grow".
- If they have a badge, look at their name and say 'Hello X, good to meet you.'
- If you're not sure whether you've actually met someone before, to be safe, you could say, "It is very nice to see you."
- Always give your name when introducing yourself, unless you are sure they know your name. They might say, "Of course I remember you," but inside their head they might be thinking 'I'm so pleased they told me'.

4. Joining someone on their own

- You could start with a friendly question, for example:
 - "Hello, my name is X. I don't know anyone here, do you?"
 - "What did you think of the talk?"
 - "What interested you about coming to this event today?"
 - "Is this the first event you've been to at this organisation?"

- Once you're talking, you could ask other people standing on their own to join you, and form a new group, just as you would if you were the host.
- If you had a party at home and saw someone you didn't know, or someone on their own, you wouldn't hesitate in going over, saying hello and seeing if they are being looked after.

5. To join a small group

- When you spot 2 or 3 friendly looking people, smile, you could simply say:
 - "Hello, my name is X. May I join you?"
 - "Hello, my name is X. I thought I'd come and introduce myself."
 - "Hi, can I join the party?"
- Try not to butt in if two or three people are engrossed in a private conversation.
- If they block you out, they probably don't want to be interrupted. Don't take this personally and simply move on.
- Never worry that you're too junior to speak to anyone.
- The trick is to make anyone you're talking to feel fascinating and then status won't come into it. In the worst case scenario, you don't need to linger too long.
- If you can't find anyone to join, look for the organizer or someone with a badge from the hosting organisation – they will always be welcoming and can easily introduce you to other attendees to get you off on the right foot.

6. Listening

- You're not trying to sell yourself at this stage. You're just trying to connect with someone so they'll remember you. And the best way to connect is to listen.
- The trick is to listen 'consciously'. Start with their name - try to repeat it back to them straight away in conversation. It will help you remember and shows that you've been listening.
- The natural tendency is not to forget names but not to hear them in the first place - we often get distracted by something else (what they're wearing or the fact that they look like a teacher from school, etc).
- If you have to introduce someone and you can't remember their name say, "I'm so sorry. I can't remember your surname." They will either reply "Jane Smith" or "Call me Jane."

- If you've met them both before and can't remember either of their names, say, "You two really should meet. I'll let you introduce yourselves." Smile broadly and they won't realise that you can't remember.
- Try to look them in the eye as they speak to show that you're interested and are listening.
- React appropriately - smile if they tell you a funny story, show empathy at a sensitive story etc.
- Try not to look over someone's shoulder, as if you're looking for someone more important to speak to.
- Try not to be a 'One-Upper' - don't just wait for a chance to come in with something about yourself. So if they say, "I've just come back from Italy", don't be tempted to say, "Well I've just come back from the Bahamas." We shouldn't be trying to outdo each other.
- Try to have a 'human' conversation. So if they say, "I've just come back from Italy", you could say, "What do you love about Italy?"
- Inserting the word 'love', or 'like', tends to make them answer more truthfully so you have a real conversation with them on a human level. And it shows that you've been listening.

7. Keep the conversation going

- Ask questions to try to find common interests with the other person. Here are some questions you could ask to keep the conversation going:
 - What was your first job?
 - What are you most proud of?
 - How do you listen to podcasts in the car?
 - What's your toughest challenge right now?
 - How do you handle stress?
 - How do you relax?
 - Do you have a role model?
 - What is your favourite saying?
 - Do you have a personal motto?
 - Who would you like as a mentor?
 - What's the best career advice you've ever been given?
 - What's the best advice your parents ever gave you?
 - What has your dog/cat taught you about life?

- Why did you choose to work for your company?
- What will you do when you retire?
- What newspapers do you read?
- What's your favourite book?
- Do you have a favourite business book?
- What's your favourite holiday destination?
- What's your favourite city?
- Do you have a hobby?
- Do you have a favourite sport?
- Do you have a favourite song?
- Did you make any New Year's resolutions this year?
- What's your newest interest?
- Are you an animal lover?
- Do you have a favourite store?
- What's your best networking success story?
- Another good way to keep the conversation going is to ask for their advice. People love giving advice, it makes them feel useful and valued.
- You could recommend something or suggest another event or an appropriate book. This shows that you've been listening and that you're thoughtful.
- It's best not to say anything negative – it makes you look the lesser person if you rubbish something. Always be positive and create trust.
- Questions about family can be a tricky. For example, you don't know whether or not they have children in their life or if they've recently suffered a loss.

8. Leaving a conversation

- Try never to have a full glass, that way you always have an excuse to go and fill it up. You could always slip away from them at the busy bar area.
- Or pick up two glasses at the start, so you can say you're on your way to meet someone.
- You can pretend you've seen someone who's about to leave and say: "Would you excuse me, there's someone I need to say hello to and I can see they're about to leave."
- Never say that you have to go yourself unless you actually go straight away. It will be embarrassing to bump into them an hour later when you haven't left.

- Introduce them to someone else appropriate and then leave them together, saying, “As you’re interested in X, please let me introduce you to Y.”
- When you do leave, always try to leave graciously by saying how good it was to meet them: “It’s been a pleasure to meet you, Sarah, I hope you enjoy the talk/event.”
- Or try repeating back something they said earlier, for example, “It’s been a pleasure to meet you, Sarah. Have a lovely time in Cornwall.”
- If appropriate, you can ask for their card.
- Don’t feel embarrassed about asking for a card or giving yours - it’s actually flattering. Simply say: “It was lovely to meet you, may I take your card in case I ever need advice on X?” Then offer your own card, even if they don’t ask for it.
- Business card etiquette can vary with different cultures. Make sure you take a moment to read their card – don’t just thrust it into your pocket. This way you can also double check their name too!
- Make sure you have your business cards in one pocket and put the cards you receive from others in a different one. You don’t want to hand out someone else’s card - and shuffling business cards just looks messy and unprofessional.

9. After the event

- On the way home, remember to write notes on the back of each business card with personal details to help you remember them (for example, very tall or wore a tie with elephants on it).
- Add a brief detail from your conversation so you can mention it next time you speak (for example, About to get married or loves cooking).
- Follow up the next day, and certainly within 48 hours. This is essential if you want them to remember you
- When you do follow up, remind them of where you met.
- Try to offer them something helpful for free, like, “Here’s the name of that book we spoke about” or “Here’s a link to an article I thought you might like.”

10. Networking online via Video Conference

- The close up nature of video conference means that we need to reign in our energy, and pull back a little, so we appear relaxed. We mustn’t look like we’re desperate or that we’re selling ourselves.

- We must keep our voice calm and kind.
- Try halving your volume online, the digital quality of computer mics is that we can sound harsh if we're not careful.
- Keep your eyes relaxed and kind too. An inner twinkle goes a long way!
- The natural flow of conversation isn't the same as in person meetings, so we have to create the flow. To help the other person, make it clear when you have finished a thought so they know when to come in. And try not to interrupt.

To sum up

- Networking is a great way to meet new and interesting people.
- You're not there to sell.
- You're just there to make connections for the future.
- Remember, you don't have to be 'interesting' - you just have to be 'interested'.
- So, the next time you go to a Networking event:
 - Be curious
 - Ask questions
 - Listen
 - Make friends
 - And Enjoy.



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