

The Art and Value of Networking

Networking events are usually a mix of both business and social networking, depending on the group and style of the event.

For small business owners these offer not only the opportunity to promote their business/service but also the chance to talk to people in similar circumstances and obtain advice and assistance. It can be lonely on your own!

For many, however, networking with people they don't know is fraught. They have to leave their comfort zones. Their biggest fear is of rejection by those they approach, and there is a tendency to huddle with colleagues or congregate with people they already know. The good news is that you can teach yourself the skills you need to network and feel confident in these situations.

Networking is a great way to generate business opportunities, contacts and links to others but is not an occasion for a hard sell. Networking, like speed dating, is a two way process. You have to give and receive.

To get the most out of networking, the skills and techniques need to be practiced and events prepared for. Follow our 10 techniques overleaf.

Good networking!

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10 NETWORKING TECHNIQUES

1

•**Pass It On!** Approach networking as an opportunity not only to help yourself but to help others. If you can't help them – do you know someone who can?

2

•**Opportunities:** All contacts are potential opportunities – if not now perhaps tomorrow. If not for you, for someone you know. Be prepared, always have a card available. Yes, always.

3

•**Make the first move – Smile!** A smile, with good eye contact, starts the ball rolling.

4

•**Opening lines – breaking the ice.** Follow up the smile with an interesting/memorable line. Use small talk as an opener; weather, sport, the tie or jacket they are wearing, a comment on the speaker. This relaxes you both and leaves the ground open.

5

•**The script/the elevator.** Have your script about who you are, what you/your company does, what's unique about your service, your USP, ready to roll off your tongue. Practice it in advance so it's not stilted but don't overdo so it sounds false

6

•**Remember names:** The easiest trick is to actually use the person's name as you talk. Usually three uses in a conversation will embed their name in your memory e.g. 'How do you do, John. That's interesting, John. Nice to have met you, John.'

7

•**Listen actively:** Networking is a two way process. Give them a chance and show your interest by commenting (briefly), nodding, keeping eye contact and showing agreement.

8

•**Work the room:** Don't get stuck with one person. Stay away from colleagues. Others are put off approaching if there are two of you. Everyone is there for the same reason. Use opportunities to bring someone else into the conversation, produce your card, excuse yourself, summarise but move on. Use any attendance list to highlight those you want to target in advance, ask hosts to introduce you.

9

•**Exchange Details:** Cards or simple flyers are sufficient but essential. Always have a stock even when not working. Opportunity knocks outside the 9-5.

10

•**Follow Up:** If you genuinely agree to do something, send an introduction, meet up later – do it. Make time. Record their details in your database/card index when you get back so you can easily find them again/invite them etc.