

10 Tips to Use at Your Next Networking Event

Networking has been part of the business scene for as long as business has been a function of mankind's evolution. For some business owners, a networking event brings about a sleepless night prior to the event. For others, networking is enjoyable and a planned activity that supports the growth of their business.

A networking event is an opportunity to build relationships. I am an observer of people and it always mystifies me when I see business people make the effort to attend a networking event and they spend the time talking with their employees or the people they interact with on a daily basis. This relationship building can be done more easily than at a networking event! The purpose of networking is to build *new* relationships. Introduce yourself to people you don't know!

1. When you arrive at a networking event:
 - a. Thank the host or sponsor for the networking opportunity.
 - b. Immediately find someone you don't know to introduce yourself to.
 - c. Be in the right frame of mind.
2. Listen! You are *not* there to sell. Listening is the first rule of relationship building.
3. Be sure to have clean business cards. It is surprising how many people arrive at networking events with no or crumpled business cards. This is a big "no-no."
4. As soon as the event is over, make sure to write notes on the backs of business cards where you met this person and anything you want to remember about them. Trust me, within 2 hours of the event, you'll forget 75% of what you wanted to remember.
5. Use other people's names in the course of conversation to imprint it in your memory. The ability to remember names is a skill that can be developed. It just takes practice.
6. STOP talking about yourself. You won't learn much about other people if you are constantly talking. Ask questions and listen. You'll be amazed at how much you will learn.
7. Make eye contact with people who are engaged in conversation with you. Knowing how to make eye contact without staring or getting distracted takes practice. If you have a difficult time with this, practice in everyday conversations until you are comfortable with your ability to maintain eye contact.
8. Keep one hand free to be able to shake hands with people. Loading your hands up with a drink in one hand and a food plate in the other doesn't create a great networking posture. If you need to eat, do so early on at the event and then allow yourself to participate fully in networking. Networking events aren't the place for full course meals.
9. Find people who are standing off to the side by themselves and initiate a conversation with them. Help them get introduced around the group.
10. Do not ask people for their business cards unless you really intend to follow up with them. You are at the networking event to develop relationships. If you've determined that you would most probably never do business with a person, why ask for their card? The game isn't won by those who accumulate the most cards!

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