

# Sharpen your networking skills

For some, networking comes natural.

For most, it doesn't. Your small talk fizzles. Your words aren't coming out right and you feel intimidated by some of the people you should be chatting it up with. So you ignore them. But networking is an art you can learn and certainly get better at. Here are tips to help reduce those awkward encounters:

- 1. Doing research prior to entering any networking scenario is a game changer.** I recommend formally budgeting time on your calendar to prepare. Review attendees on the registration list (often shared if asked) and practice your 30 second introduction.
- 2. Don't be scared to use adjectives in your introduction** such as frustrated, disappointed, or concerned. The right story and examples will make you memorable and relatable.
- 3. Networking is about giving, serving, and supporting.** A savvy networker understands this universal rule and seeks opportunities to add value to others. They are great listeners, doers, and have zero expectation of getting anything in return. And because of that they receive tenfold.
- 4. Networking starts with building rapport.** Rapport happens when small talk is effortless and fun. Being exceptional at small talk takes skill. How we respond to questions like *"How is business?"* or *"How are you doing?"* is critical. Responses with short answers such as "slow" or "busy" are uninteresting. Try something like: *"Business is doing well! This week I started 3 new projects that are looking extremely profitable."* Or *"I am doing extremely well. After one of the busiest quarters in our industry, I am taking a vacation in the Caribbean to recharge!"* These types of responses provoke interest, questions, and help people engage more easily.
- 5. Networking is about having the right mindset.** Understand that networking is not selling. Too many people have anxiety over networking events or even networking one on one. Networking is simply the catalyst to building relationships. Great relationships reap rewards. One of my favorite quotes is by Alfred North Whitehead. *"No one who achieves success does so without the help of others."* Habit 2 in Steven Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* is "Begin with the End in Mind."
- 6. Use a Contact Management System such as Microsoft Outlook.** This platform offers a tool to enter all your contacts. Discipline yourself to write notes about the last interaction you had and calendar a date to follow up.
- 7. Follow up with your network.** Staying top of mind is the key to success. Most people don't follow up so the people who do stand out and enjoy a robust network of people they can count on when they need them. The worst thing to do is call on people only when you need something. Always try to add value. I find when I bring two people together in my network and make an introduction that can add value to both, I reap rewards.
- 8. Don't overload yourself with too many networking events or opportunities.** First focus on creating your inner circle and become known as a trusted advisor. Imagine being the one that dozens of people relied on for an answer to a question or to provide a referral? This builds credibility and helps you achieve your own goals along the way.

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