

Lattitude7

presents a

Hot Tips Success Guide to Networking




Is networking a bit of a mystery to you? Do you hate walking into a room full of strangers; actually talking to people and trying to think of something to say? Well, if so, you are not alone.

*But, if you are looking to put bread on the table and have a stimulating career then your best chance of success is through meeting other people and that means **NETWORKING.***

Networking Hot Tips Success Guide

Sometimes we resist putting ourselves forward or we don't look for networking opportunities. And, when such opportunities are created, or just happen, we often don't make the best impression or we say the wrong things. However, with some simple tips and a bit of practice, you could be an effective networker, enabling you to build a circle of contacts that can help to positively influence your career journey.

In this booklet we have put together some hot tips  to help you dispel your fears, build your confidence and help you become an effective networker. We cover: preparing for a meeting, asking the right questions, recognising a business opportunity, building relationships with the people you meet, eliminating your doubts and concerns and how to make confident follow up phone calls.

When and when to Network

You can network almost everywhere you go; talk to people in supermarkets, trains, buses, in the evenings, at weekends. Remember you do not know who the people are or who they know so be prepared at all times. Opportunities are all around you and some of the best contacts come from the most unexpected places. Attend the most appropriate network events (where your target customers/contacts) are likely to be. Otherwise you may be wasting your time, energy and money.

Before a networking event

Before attending any networking session we need a clear set of objectives. Before the event, try and find out as much as you can about who will be there, how you can help some of the people who will be present. Check out the dress code and decide what to wear. Formulate a few interesting questions in your mind and rehearse these so that you are not stuck for words when you get to the networking event.

Hot Tip

Carry business cards with you EVERYWHERE. It is amazing who you might meet and want to exchange cards with.



During the event

Get to the networking meeting ahead of time; this will give you more chance to network before the event officially starts. If you are there first it puts you in a strong position because you can meet people as they arrive and introduce them to others you have already met.

Who to talk to

Take a deep breath and walk tall, you are as good as anyone else there. If you recognise someone you know that's great otherwise you could head for the tea & coffee or food table as these are great places to start up a conversation.

Have the confidence to join already formed groups, it is your right to go and talk to people, and you are at a networking event. However, just have a think about the type of groups to join. Try ONE person stood on their own – join them, they will be your friend for life (or at least for the duration of the event). Or THREE people stood together but at 90 degrees to each other. This configuration creates an open space, a 'welcome mat', for a visitor. Go join them and talk in the group or in a pair.



Join someone
on their own!



What to say to other people

When meeting someone, keep a hand free to shake hands, a firm handshake is a good start. At the same time, SMILE and MAKE EYE CONTACT.

Introduce yourself then listen carefully for the person's name and repeat it back to them. If it's an unusual name, ask them where it comes from. Then ask about their business and look interested!

Hot Tip

Roger Ailes said: 'we only get 7 seconds to make an impression' and, we don't get a second chance at making the right first impression. Just be yourself and make a positive impression – you know you can do it!

Hot Tip

To help you with questioning you could formulate a list of question themes (work, holidays, travel etc), put these into pictures in your mind and then link them together in a stack. Using this memory technique will overcome the embarrassing pauses we sometimes get during conversations.

Consider your questioning style: Always try to ask OPEN questions that require an answer which is more than Yes or No. An open question might be: what do you think about ...? or, what would happen if ...? These questions keep the conversation flowing and are preferable to CLOSED questions such as: did you have a good holiday? Or is business good at the moment? These closed questions can result in Yes/No answers and can, therefore, stifle the conversation.

Listening

People love to talk about themselves so learn to LISTEN (we have two ears and two eyes and only one mouth, so we should try and converse in that ratio). Make every effort to turn the conversation back to them.



E.g.: keep your story short – I went to Spain, it was great.
Where did you go for your holidays? And keep the questions coming!
Be sincere as insincerity can be spotted a mile off.



Hot Tip

Remember to ask for their business card and give them yours. Never, ever, force your business card on anyone. As soon as you can, and discretely, make a note on their Business card to remind you where and when you met them (this will be useful later).

Your values, your brand and your USP

As well as being pleasant and personable, the secret of networking is to have some kind of differentiation. Have a think about your Unique Selling Point (USP) and how you can do things better, faster or cheaper than others' in your sector. You need to be aware of your values and what makes you, and your offering, special. It is best to start thinking of yourself as a 'brand' (like Coca Cola, Nike or Hewlett Packard).

Elevator Pitch

At some events you may be asked to introduce yourself and talk about your business. You therefore need to have an Elevator Pitch up your sleeve so you could consider putting one together. This is where you talk about yourself, your business and, most importantly, the benefits of doing business with you, in around half a minute. You could construct your elevator pitch using the AIDA framework (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action).

Moving on (called 'working the room')

Depending on where you are and who you meet, you will probably want to move on to meet more people.

Be careful not to offend someone by leaving them too soon, and try not to stay in a conversation too long. If you don't believe there will ever be any synergy with the other person then continue to 'work the room'.

At the end of the event remember to say GOODBYE to your host/hostess and to anyone you have spent some time with.

After the Event

A networking meeting is just the 'tip of the relationship iceberg'. In order to form useful, lasting relationships, it is critical that you follow up after the networking event. Go through all the Business cards and respond to most contacts, politely, and in a timely fashion.

Exceed Expectations

You may have been asked for some information or you may have promised to follow up on a specific point. Ask your contact for a few days to allow you to get back to them and then exceed their expectations by getting back to them immediately if possible. NEVER find yourself in a situation where your new contacts are chasing you.



Hot Tip

You are now in control of the situation. This is why it was important to take their business card from them. You are much more likely to get a response or follow-up meeting by phoning than by sending an e-mail. Then, when you phone your contact refer to your meeting/conversation at the event to refresh their memory. Always be confident and positive when you phone and keep a smile on your face as this gesture is transmitted over the airwaves.



The answer is almost, always, YES

If, after a network meeting, people ask to meet you, then find the time for a coffee, you never know when you will need them and they will really appreciate your support. You do not know what they will be doing next and who it might lead you to in the future.



Hot Tip

Continue to keep in touch. When driving around, drinking tea or just when you have a spare few minutes, think about people you have not contacted for a long time and give them a call. You are just touching base to check they are ok and it may result in a meeting. They will also think highly of you for thinking of them.

Is it working?

And finally, monitor your progress. Ask yourself questions like: How is networking working for me?, Am I attending the right events? Am I meeting the right people? What do I need to be doing differently? Try out different networking groups and find the ones that work for you.

How to find people

Contacts can be found through various groups such as: Alumni, BNI, 4Networking, Creative Networks, Creative Calderdale, Forward Ladies, Chambers of Commerce etc. You just need to try a few and pick the right one(s) for you. You can also find contacts online through sites such as: LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Myspace etc.



Hot Tip

You can boost your networking opportunities by contributing to others' blogs and commenting on articles in a really constructive way. You will then be viewed as a 'contributor'.

Finally

Try to think of networking as, at least, a four-touch relationship process. Something along the lines of: Meet – Like – Know - Trust. Never ask people for their business during the early stages of this relationship model. Eventually, after a few meetings you can ask people for their business and you will know when the time is right. And, if you don't ask you may never know what opportunity you have missed.



Hot Tip

PEOPLE TALK so make sure they are only saying positive things about you when you are not there! And, you never know what a contact knows or more importantly who they know, so treat each person as if they were your next biggest client.

Let's go networking, it gets easier with practice!

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This booklet includes some basic tips, but ...

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