

A Young Professional's Guide to Networking

No matter what position, company or industry you are in, you will most likely find yourself having to network. Being able to master the art of networking can open doors on both personal and professional levels. Whether you are just starting your career, don't quite feel comfortable at networking events just yet or are a seasoned pro, we've compiled some of our best tips and tricks for your next event!

Be Curious

Don't pretend like you know everything during a conversation – the more authentic interest you can convey to an individual or a group of people, the more likely they are to continue the conversation in a natural way. One great way to do this is by looking someone directly in the eyes to show them you are genuinely interested in what they have to say – not just looking around for who to talk to next or thinking about what it is you want to say next.

Play It Cool

If you feel uncomfortable, position yourself next to the bar/activity at the event – this makes it easier to start conversations.

Be a Contact Collector

Have business cards (digital or physical) to give out, and have something to put other people's cards into (e.g., business card holder, folder from the event) – don't shove them in your pockets! When you get a business card, make a genuine comment about it, or look for things that stand out or are noteworthy. It's an easy way to create a shared connection.

Stop Selling

Networking is not a sales pitch! Sometimes it may end in a sales discussion, but the goal is not a sale – it is a meaningful conversation. Networking is most valuable when long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationships are formed. Relationships take time to build. Be patient and stay in touch with people you like in different positions, parts of the industry or parts of the world.



Be a Resource

Being helpful is one of the best networking tricks out there. By asking "How can I help you?", you open the door to a mutual relationship of support – this could be introducing them to someone you know or simply sending them information on a new topic. By bringing value to someone's life, you immediately create a shared connection.

Take Notes

After a meaningful conversation with a new contact, take some time to jot down notes on the interaction (on the person's business card or in the notes app on your phone). Did you talk about baseball, an upcoming vacation or a new product launch? This will make following up and your next conversation easier, since you can mention a topic that you discussed last time. It will also help jog your memory in case you need to put a face with a name.

Have No Fear

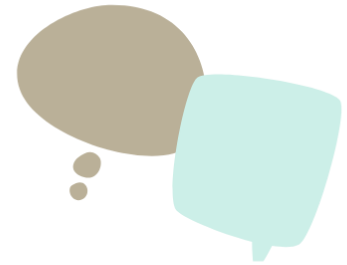
Don't shy away from talking to people due to their titles. Individuals with "higher" titles than you usually have great knowledge, experience and stories to share. They are people, just like you.

Plan Ahead

Create a list of individuals and companies that you would like to meet and add to your network. You can even go one step further and create a one-page dossier on each person with a screenshot of their profile picture and where you might find them. Then, when you have a lull between meetings or conference sessions, pull out your list and go meet some new people!

Look Good, Feel Good

Strategize on what you are going to wear to an event. Let your outfit be a conversation starter. Wear something that makes you feel like a million bucks and helps you radiate confidence. Bring a unique accessory like a pin, scarf or pair of shoes that gets you noticed. Make a great first impression that makes people think, "I have to meet that person!" This will help people remember you and give you a talking point in follow-up emails.



Say Their Name

Many people have heard the famous quotation by Dale Carnegie: "Remember that a person's name is, to that person, the sweetest and most important sound in any language." If you are in a meeting with a group of new people and struggle with names, draw a diagram of the room and write the names of the people who are sitting at each chair. Make sure to end the conversation using their name in some form – such as, "Great meeting you, Sampson."

Celebrate Anything and Everything

People are drawn to charisma and positivity. Giving everyone a small reason to celebrate unifies a group of people, even if it's the slightest accomplishment, such as making it through flights and layovers without complication!

Be Complimentary

If you do not know how to start a conversation with someone or feel awkward just diving into an introduction, try sharing a compliment with the person you're trying to talk to. Whether you're approaching a conference speaker to say you enjoyed their thoughts or you like someone's fun socks, sharing a compliment is a great way to spur conversation and introduce yourself.

Build a Reputation

In the networking world, people prefer to build business relationships with others they see as valuable. Building a reputation as someone who is helpful and valuable makes people more motivated to meet you and stay in touch. You'll end up building a master network. Let people know what you're accomplishing, and learn through blogging, emails and conversations.

Remember the 5 W's

Ask open-ended questions that can kick-start a conversation – think who, what, where, when and why. Here are a few to get you started:

- What brought you to this event today?
- Who are you looking to meet at this event? (Bonus tip – if you know that person, offer to introduce them! If you don't, promise to bring them into the conversation if you meet them. It will instantly make you valuable to that person.)
- What differentiates your company from your competitors?
- What does a good referral look like for you?
- Is this your first time at this event, conference, etc.? What brings you back?
- What do you find is the most impactful way to network at these types of events?
- What do you like most about working for your company?

Always Leave With a Next Step

If you have synergy with someone, always walk away with the next step in mind – such as connecting on LinkedIn, planning a coffee/lunch/virtual meeting together, meeting at their office or inviting them to yours, making an introduction to someone else or following up on a deliverable that you promised. Having a next step can bridge a conversation into a relationship.

And Finally, There Is No Pressure

If you have had a day in which you are just completely exhausted and your social battery has run completely dry, go take some time to enjoy some peace and quiet either outside or somewhere you can be alone. Take a few moments to reset, and reenter the networking event refreshed before taking it on again.

