

How to Become a Power Networker: Part Two

by Carol Dunitz, Ph.D.

What do you do when you've just met someone? How do you introduce yourself? How much should you say? Do you just bolt into asking open-ended questions? Practicing introductory remarks will make it easier to enter into unexpected conversations or get things going when you find yourself with people you have not met before. Responding in a way that shows others they have your undivided attention is very important. And getting the most out of every event you attend is the networker's goal.

Prepare an Elevator Speech. Some people are immediately comfortable striking up conversations with people they do not know. Most people are not. For that reason it makes sense to prepare a 30 second sound bite for yourself. It's referred to as an elevator speech because it lasts only as long as it takes to travel several floors in an elevator.

This is a short, upbeat personal introduction that demonstrates what you and your company are about and how you can be of benefit to others. At the same time, you should be putting your receivers at ease and making them feel so comfortable that they, too, want to join the conversation.

Customize your introduction by having several opening lines to use based on who you are speaking with. A little humor may work well here. It serves to make the encounter memorable.

Pass Out Business Cards. Always take a hearty supply of business cards with you when you go to networking events. Business cards are the least expensive form of advertising available and they often stay around for a long time. Hand them out liberally. And don't forget to get one from every person to whom you give yours.

Your business card is an extension of you. It speaks and sells for you when you are no longer with someone. For that reason it is important to have one that is well designed and makes a favorable impression about you and your business.

Make sure your business card has an attractive design. Use your logo if you have one. Consider including a slogan or byline under your company name that is memorable and speaks to what you do. Take advantage of both sides and include important information on the back. Don't forget to include your e-mail and web site address. And even if you are a 'techie,' don't omit your phone number. It's really irritating for those of us who are not.

Use good quality paper and color to stand out.

Put the Needs of Others Before Your Own. It may be that the best way to measure your networking success is by the meaningful conversations you've had. When you meet new people, listen for their names. Use their names when talking with them. It will help you remember

names for future encounters. It will also ingratiate you with those you are talking to. People like to hear their names.

Listen carefully to understand who they are and what is meaningful to them. Understand what their needs are and offer to be of assistance. Offer to get together with them one on one to discuss their business and see if there is any way you can help them. Don't offer unsolicited advice. It's a turnoff. But do respond with suggestions and ideas if the person you are talking with requests them. If you offer to do something for them, follow through. If you don't, you can be sure it will be remembered and quite possibly repeated to others.

Be sure to focus on the other person's needs, not your own. If they ask about yours, then share those needs with them. As you build a relationship there will be plenty of time to ask others for help as needed. In any case, networking is not about 'tit for tat.' You don't do something so someone else will do something for you. You do it because you like to help others. Of course, it is nice when the favor is reciprocated.

Ask for Help When You Need It. If you have been generous with your time there is every reason to expect that many of the people to whom you have offered assistance will be happy to help you. Be direct about your needs. Your friends and associates will respond appropriately.

Maximize the Potential of Networking Events. Before attending a meeting or event, do your research. Find out about the company, the speaker, the speaker's topic and anything else that is relevant to the meeting. If you're going to a large conference or trade show, figure out the most effective way to cover all ground. Determine who you want to meet and where you might find them.

Arrive early. You can't be fashionably late to a networking event. When attending a business function, arrive early to mingle with other guests and the speaker. Scan the sign-in sheet to see who is attending and who you want to meet. Bring product literature with you in case a display table is available.

Wear a Name Tag. Put your name tag on the right in the line of vision of people you shake hands with.

Get in Line. Head for the bar, refreshment table, and registration desk--wherever there is a line or people congregate. This provides a natural opportunity to start a conversation with those around you. Circulate. Mingle. Move out of your comfort zone. Play the host and invite others to join.

Connect. Focus on people you don't know. Reinforce relationships with people you know casually. Be sure to spend meaningful time with people you really want to be with.

Introduce Yourself. Then follow with open-ended questions to get the conversation rolling. People love to talk about themselves. Showing genuine interest will start you off on the right foot.

Actively Listen. Everyone will think you are a great conversationalists. Be curious. Let others talk about themselves. People love to talk about themselves. Ask questions that encourage them to talk about their business. This may give you information on how you can plan to cultivate the relationship. Share your areas of expertise at a suitable time.

Don't Overstay Your Welcome. Always have an exit strategy. It is best for everyone to have the chance to mingle at these events and you don't want to talk with anyone for too long. You can always follow up after the meeting. Leave people wanting more.

Listen Intently to Presentations. Is there a presentation at the event? Sometimes you can pick up interesting leads from business presentations at meetings. Presenters may confide business issues to a group as a way to share it with their partners. Don't overlook opportunities to connect with those you might partner with.

Effective networkers stay alert, use their networking tool boxes, and take advantage of opportunities that present themselves. Do you have to take advantage of every opportunity? Of course not. Be selective. Make good choices and follow up when the event is over.

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