

Making Networking Work

The A-Z



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WHY SHOULD YOU BE NETWORKING?

Networking offers many long-term benefits to individuals and businesses.

It's a great way to strengthen connections, meet synergistic businesses, learn, grow and increase your confidence.

You will also get ideas, offer and receive advice and support, and boost your visibility.

Whether you're networking face to face or virtually, the need to build and maintain business relationships through networking is paramount – now perhaps more than ever.

I hope these networking tips will help you get the most out of the networking events you attend.

A is for Authentic

People often try and be something they're not – in a social or a business setting they put on a mask and try and fit in or conform to expected norms believing they'll be more likeable or win more business that way. But they can then be perceived as fake. Just be who you are – it's so much easier that way and you'll then be seen as genuine and trustworthy.

B is for Building Relationships

The real art of networking is not about selling it's about building relationships. It's about getting to know people and allowing them to get to know you. Relationships need to be nurtured and it can take time and perseverance for them to develop so you may need to be patient.

C is for Commitment

Networking is a bit like exercising. You can't just expect to get fit by joining a gym – you need to work at it. Networking is the same. You need to be committed if you want it to work for you. Put event dates in your diary well in advance, set the time aside, as you would for any other meeting, and attend as often as you possibly can.

D is for Dismissive

Avoid judging somebody before you get to know them. Don't be dismissive of anybody at a networking event. You never know who they know, how you can help them or how they can help you. Everybody that you talk to has a network of their own and they might be just the person to provide the missing piece of your jigsaw.

E is for Expectations

Set yourself reasonable expectations before you attend events. It's unrealistic to expect to have a meaningful conversation with everyone in the room. Instead it would be better to set yourself a target of meeting say 4 or 5 people. Or perhaps seeking out a contact in a specific business category.

F is for Follow up. Follow Up. Follow up

The importance of following up cannot be over-emphasised. Meeting someone at a networking event is only the first step of what could become a fruitful business relationship. Invest time in a follow-up meeting in order to determine whether there are mutually beneficial opportunities. This will be time well spent.



G is for Generosity

“The currency of real networking is not greed but generosity” (Keith Ferazzi). Approach networking events with a spirit of generosity. How can you help? What can you give? Who can you recommend? Share your contacts and resources and others are more likely to share theirs with you. In time you will gain from this approach.

H is for Honourable

Be true to your word. If you say you're going to do something make sure that you do it. There's nothing more frustrating than being let down by someone who's promised something. If you can't do it, don't say that you can. You risk damaging your reputation if you fail to deliver.

I is for Integrity

“No matter how educated, talented, rich or cool you believe you are, how you treat people ultimately tells it all. Integrity is everything.” (Anon). Be honest. Be truthful and honour your word. Do what you said you would do. Do it on time. And in this way you will earn people's respect.

J is for Join In

It may not come naturally to you but ensure you talk to people you don't know. The purpose of networking events is to enable you to broaden your group of contacts. If you see a group of people chatting, ask if you can join them. And if you see someone standing alone, you can be sure they'd rather not be, so invite them to join in too.

K is for Knowledge Base

Take advantage of the diverse range of skills and expertise of your fellow networkers which are readily available to you. If something difficult crops up and you aren't too sure how to handle it the chances are that someone will have faced this problem before and will be able to offer you some valuable advice.

L is for Listen

Listen more than you speak. We have two ears and one mouth and we should use them proportionately. If you really listen when someone else is speaking, rather than thinking about what you're going to say next, you'll be surprised at how much more you'll get out of the conversation.

M is for Memorable

Make yourself memorable by sharing something about your personal life – maybe hobbies or a particular book or film you have enjoyed. People want to know about you as a person not just your business. The more you find you have in common with people the more likely they are to remember you.



N is for Names

Using someone's name in a conversation is a great way of making them feel important. Use their name a few times as soon as you've been introduced - it will help you remember it. It's a great tactic as it will help to seal it in your memory and make them feel good about themselves at the same time.

O is for Opportunities

The opportunities at a networking event are endless – don't allow them to be wasted. You have the opportunity to promote your own company, to look for suppliers, to build up good connections, to gain support and share ideas. Make the most of all the opportunities that present themselves.

P is for Prepare

Think about your elevator pitch and practise talking about your business as succinctly as possible so that you can keep within the allotted time. Don't use any technical language or jargon. Remember that "facts tell and stories sell" so try and use stories or case studies to illustrate how you can bring benefits to your clients.

Q is for Questions

Ask the "right" questions. Asking yes/no questions won't really help to further the conversation. Instead ask open questions. Ask people about themselves. Ask them to be specific in the kinds of things they're looking for and in that way it will be easier for you to help them.

R is for Referrals & Recommendations

We're all comfortable giving referrals if someone has done some good work for us. But it works the other way too. If you have a satisfied customer don't be embarrassed to ask them to refer you. If you don't ask you don't get. They may need a little nudge but the chances are they'll be happy to do so.

S is for Strategic Alliances

It can sometimes be useful to seek out contacts with whom you can work collaboratively. Rather than viewing people in your sector as competitors why not explore ways in which you can work together. You may have a slightly different specialism in the same field and could play to each other's strengths.

T is for Trust

Trust is a key ingredient of networking. We do business with people we know, like and trust. It takes time to build up a level of trust but once trust has been established you will find that people are more likely to do business with you and to recommend you and your services to their friends and colleagues.



U is for Understand

Understand that networking is a process not a one-off event. If you visit a networking group expecting to do business at that first event you are likely to be disappointed. Networking is not a quick-fix. It takes time and patience to build those all-important business relationships. But if you work at the process you will reap the rewards.

V is for Visibility

Don't remain anonymous in the group. Take advantage of every opportunity to promote yourself and your business - run a seminar, put forward special offers, and bring along any relevant literature. You need to ensure that you remain front of mind when people are in need of your products or services.

W is for Worthwhile

With the rise of social media some people argue there's no longer a need for networking. However there's no substitute for good old-fashioned face-to-face meetings. Social media has its place, of course, but it should be used in conjunction with networking, not instead of it. Networking is, without doubt, worthwhile.

X is for EXperience

Reflect and learn from your experience once the event is over. Networking is a skill and like all skills it needs to be practised and refined. Think about what went well, what you could have done differently and what you could do better next time.

Y is for You

It's all about you. You are your brand. "Your smile is your logo, your personality is your business card, how you leave others feeling after an experience with you becomes your trademark" (Jay Danzie). Be true to your brand and project yourself in a good light at all times

Z is for Zombie

Yawn. Yawn. zzzzzzz Don't be known as a zombie when you go networking! Approach each event with vitality and enthusiasm. Have a positive and pro-active attitude. Take the lead rather than waiting to be asked. "Good things happen to those who wait but greater things happen to those who work at it" (Anon)

