

## Networking Tips

By Barb Cotton\*

As we all know, it is important for us to be “out and about”, and with this in mind I thought it would be fun to review some basic networking tips.

*The Fine Art of Small Talk* offers the following tips to improve networking skills: <sup>1</sup>

- Be the first to say hello!
- Introduce yourself. Act as if you're the host and introduce new arrivals to your conversational partner or partners.
- Smile first and always shake hands when you meet anyone.
- Take your time during introductions! Make an extra effort to remember names, and use them frequently in the conversation.
- Maintain eye contact in any conversation. Many people in a group of three or more look around in the hope that others will maintain eye contact on their behalf. Yet people don't feel listened to if you're not looking at them.
- Get somebody to talk about why they're attending the event. You are now on your way to engaging them in conversation.
- Show an interest in every person. The more interest you show, the more wise and attractive you become to others.
- Listen carefully for information that can keep the conversation going.
- Remember: People want to be with people who make them feel special, not people who are “special”. Take responsibility to help people you talk to feel as if they're the only person in the room.
- Play the conversation game. When someone asks *How's business?* Or *What's going on?* Answer with more than *Not much*. Tell more about yourself so that others can learn more about you.

- Be careful with business acquaintances. You wouldn't want to open a conversation with *How's your job at \_\_\_\_\_?* What if that person just got fired or laid off? Be careful when you are asking about an acquaintance's spouse or special friend; you could regret it.
- Don't act like you are an FBI agent. Questions like "What do you do?" "Are you married?" "Do you have children?" and "Where are you from?" lead to dead-end conversations.
- Be aware of body language. Nervous or ill-at-ease people make others uncomfortable. Act confident and comfortable, even when you're not.
- Be prepared. Spend a few minutes before an anticipated event preparing to talk easily about three topics. It will come in handy when you find yourself in the middle of an awkward moment . . . or while seated at a table of eight where everyone is playing with their food.
- Show an interest in your conversational partner's opinion, too. You're not the only person who has opinions about funding the space program or what will happen to the stock market.
- Stop conversation monopolists in their tracks. If possible, wait for the person to take a breath or to pause, then break in with a comment about their topic. Immediately redirect the conversation in the direction you wish it to go.
- Be prepared with exit lines. You need to move around and meet others.
- Don't melt from conversations. Make a positive impression by shaking hands and saying goodbye as you leave.

Jerry Wilkinson, the former NFL star, offers the following ten tips for effective networking: <sup>2</sup>

- Be you . . . authentic. Authenticity always has an audience.
- Find like-minded people in the business arena where your expertise meets a need.
- Do what you love and love what you do and you'll never work another day in your life.

- PMA (positive mental attitude) is like a magnet. There is so much crap in the world, that most people truly enjoy being around optimistic people who see the glass as half full.
- Take it personal, make it personal. If you don't then you won't really have a relationship (with clients or contacts).
- Send handwritten personal notes.
- Be a resource. The power of brokering education, information and fun cannot be understated.
- Timing is important. Being timely is everything.
- Visibility is key. Join organizations that you really have a passion for . . .

The following networking tips are offered as “networking do’s and networking don’ts:”<sup>3</sup>

- Keep your business cards neat and tidy – use a business card wallet or an antique cigarette case to keep the dog-ears at bay.
- Carry a pen to make notes on the cards you collect – date, function/event, other relevant details. Also make a note if you think the person you have just met would be worth introducing to someone else in your network.
- Tell people what you are looking for – business and personal - within reason.
- Ask someone you know to introduce you to someone you particularly want to meet.
- Stay in touch when you need nothing from the other person.
- Be involved – be seen on the scene.
- Pass on praise that you have heard.
- Follow-up, follow-up and follow-up in a timely and appropriately persistent manner.
- Don't misconstrue networking to be a sales plan.
- Don't be blinded by goals, only guided by them.

- Don't be quick to make judgments about people you meet, today's tin could be tomorrow's gold!
- Don't hand out your business cards willy-nilly to people you haven't had a conversation with, you will look pushy, desperate or both.
- Don't ask for more than people are willing to give.
- Don't be invasive and ask too many questions.
- Don't overstay your welcome.
- Don't use disparaging humor.
- Don't badmouth people you know and who knows the party you are talking about.
- Don't try to network with your hands full – leave glass/teacups/handbags/briefcase to one side and concentrate on networking.
- Don't get caught doing the handbag shuffle or the deep-pocket dig – never just throw some business cards into your handbag or your pocket – they will only ever appear with dog ears and the impression will be negative, not positive.
- Don't pursue, pester or push people, as you will almost certainly lose the contact.
- Don't break any promises for example, to pass on information, contacts or meet for coffee etc.

Just some fun “meet and greet” advice so we're all ready to mingle.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Debra Fine, *The Fine Art of Small Talk* (Englewood, Colorado: Small Talk Publishers, 2004) at pp. 117-119

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.legalmarketingblog.com/marketing-tips-215-10-tips-4-effective-networking>

<sup>3</sup> 2002 TiG Alliance

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