# 7 tips for top networking

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Networking can be a valuable way to meet new people and perhaps even land a job – or it might be a total waste of time. Here are seven tips to ensure it’s the former rather than the latter.

Most of us been there: standing awkwardly in the corner of a busy room – perhaps it’s a conference or industry awards night – and we don’t know a soul. Worse still, we don’t have the skills or confidence to network effectively.

Knowing the right people and being seen at the right events can get you places that you might not otherwise reach. Whether it’s rustling up fresh business, finding a job or creating relationships with key people, networking is a skill that is essential to success in business and life in general.

Here are seven top tips to network more effectively.

Consider your body language. Enter the room with confidence, with shoulders back and a smile on your face. Look for a friendly face and introduce yourself. Don’t panic if you don’t see an immediate opportunity to connect with someone. A guaranteed conversation starter is to get in a line (to register to the event, for food, for drinks, and yes, even for the restrooms). Ask the person hosting the event for an introduction. In addition, if the list of attendees is available prior to the meeting you can identify someone you would like to meet and approach someone to ask if the person you are looking for is at the meeting.

Do your research. If you are networking with people who are known in the industry, do your research before you join the fray. Know something about what they do, what their experience has been, and any accomplishments they may have under their belt. Even a basic LinkedIn search might reveal some nuggets to drop into a casual conversation.

Be an avid listener. The old saying, ‘two ears, one mouth’, is never more appropriate than in a professional networking setting. This is a basic prerequisite for effective networking – networking gurus even advocate the 80:20 ratio for listening and speaking. Let’s face it, everyone likes to talk about themselves – so let them. This is the essential phrase to remember: ‘Tell me more about…’

It’s a two-way street. Networking is about building relationships so although you should adhere to the 80:20 rule, don’t forget to add some value. Perhaps you can recommend a great book or website, share an article, or maybe you can make a valuable introduction.

Be ready with your ‘pitch’. You’ll eventually be asked what you do for a living, so be ready. Don’t ramble on about how long you have been in business or how your business process works. That’s boring to everyone except you and your immediate colleagues – and maybe your pet dog. Instead, develop a 10-30 second ‘elevator pitch’ that clearly communicates what you do and for whom you do it. Oh, and don’t forget your business cards! Even in this digital age it can’t hurt to have a stash in your handbag or pocket. If someone hands you one of theirs but you fear you might not remember what you talked about, jot down a few keywords on the back of the card as a prompter for after the event.

Plot your exit strategy. Remember, you’re in the room for a purpose – to meet as many people as possible. Don’t be afraid to politely excuse yourself and thank the person for his or her time. Reasons to move on can include going to get another drink, something to eat, going to the restroom, or needing to talk with someone before they leave. Whatever the reason, be honest and be genuine.

Follow through. If you’ve made a promise to do something for a fresh contact (a call, to send an article or make an introduction) do it! Utilise social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to keep track of your contacts and stay in touch with them.

“All contacts are equal but some are more equal than others”. Yes, ‘power contacts’ do exist. As you begin networking and mingling with others, you will meet people who will eventually act as your power contacts. They will introduce you to new contacts, refer you and help you establish yourself in your sector.

So, next time you head to an industry event, don’t treat it like an excuse to offload that entire pack of business cards. ‘Work the room’ with aplomb and reap the benefits.