

MAKING THE MOST FROM NETWORKING

FOR PEOPLE WHO AVOID NETWORKING

People often avoid networking for several reasons. They may not feel comfortable making small talk. They may feel anxious about promoting themselves. They may be naturally shy, or they may think of networking as insincere and transactional. However, networking offers important benefits, including uncovering the “hidden” job market, staying informed about industry trends, and raising your professional profile. Networking can also help you identify a mentor and others who can assist you in developing your skills.

Preparing for the Event

1. **Be intentional:** Know why networking is important to you and act upon those reasons or goals. Work your plan for each event.
2. **Aim for connection over quantity:** Focus on achieving a few meaningful conversations.
3. **Know your lines:** Arrive with open-ended questions such as, “What brings you here?” or “What was your favorite part of the presentation?” Practice a 15-second introduction about who you are and what you do.
4. **Choose structured events:** Prioritize workshops, speaker events, seminars, or other events that have a built-in agenda (and limit the pressure to mingle).
5. **Research the attendees:** If the participant list is accessible beforehand, find individuals you genuinely want to meet.
6. **Reframe your purpose:** View networking as making new acquaintances or as lifelong learning.

Attending the Event

7. **Find a networking buddy:** Tag along with a more extroverted friend or colleague who can help make introductions.
8. **Look for people like you:** If you spot individuals standing by themselves or looking at their phones, they may be as eager to chat as you are.
9. **Join gently:** If a group is chatting, wait for a natural pause before asking if you can join.
10. **Listen more than talk:** Ask engaging questions and let the other person do most of the talking.
11. **Take strategic breaks:** Allow yourself a few minutes of time alone to recharge your battery.
12. **Close a conversation politely:** Say something like, “I’ll let you go, but I’m glad we chatted” or “It was great talking with you, I hope you enjoy the conference.”
13. **Leave when you’re ready:** Once you’ve had a solid interaction, it’s perfectly fine to leave before you feel worn out.

Reaching Out After the Event

14. **Leverage digital spaces:** Use LinkedIn to comment thoughtfully on work-related posts and to make connections.
15. **Personalize your connections:** When adding a connection online, include a short note about why you want to connect.
16. **Ask for digital coffee breaks:** Invite people for a brief virtual chat as an alternative to a crowded room.
17. **Follow up the next day:** Send a quick email or message referencing your conversation at the event to solidify the connection.
18. **Pace your outreach:** Pace your follow-ups to maintain a steady stream of relationship-building.
19. **Lean on mutual connections:** Ask mutual acquaintances to introduce you to new people rather than always reaching out alone.
20. **Skip group meetings:** Bypass events altogether by asking people directly if they would be open to a brief person-to-person meeting.

