

Networking

Effective Networking Tips

Networking is probably the most effective and least expensive marketing method you can use to create career opportunities.

A lot of people don't like to network because they feel that they are being pushy, selling themselves or asking for favors. Or, "I'm shy" or, it doesn't work and I never get anything out of it.

N.B. – Networking is the most powerful tool in your career development. I cannot over emphasise this statement. It's not about selling or getting something now, it's about creating and developing long, lasting relationships, that may deliver next week, or in a year or two.

Networking Rule No. 1 – God knew what he was doing when he gave you two ears and one mouth. Be more interested than interesting. You are not asking for a job, you are sharing and gathering common interest information.

Here are some suggestions that will help you to become a more successful networker:

- 1. Start your networking today.** Look back at who you went to school, university, or worked with, friends or family connections. This is a lifelong exercise. Always collect business cards and write some notes on the back to help you to remember them. In three years time, it will all be in context and make you look good, if you were to follow up. Networking is a process, not a one-off event.
- 2. Be selective.** Not every group of people will be right for you. Time is precious, so don't waste yours or theirs. Choose people who share similar interests to you, or are potential clients. Chambers of Commerce, men's and women's organisations, networking groups, special interest groups, and associations are all potential opportunities for networking.
- 3. Develop relationships.** Networking is not about selling, but rather about developing relationships that can lead to introductions, referrals or business opportunities. The idea is to get to know people and allow them to get to know you. People do business with those they know and trust, and it can take time to build up that knowledge and trust. Remember people's names when you are introduced to them.
- 4. Dress appropriately and professionally.** Establish yourself as a successful person, by dressing for the part. This does not mean that you need to wear expensive clothes, but dress like you belong. If necessary, get advice from an image consultant.
- 5. Be prepared.** Bring plenty of business cards, but only give them to people who show a real interest in what you do. Develop your "elevator pitch", your 20 second, relevant, descriptive, and positive introduction of you!
- 6. Ask questions and listen.** Encourage people to talk about themselves then ask follow up questions. People like to feel acknowledged and valued.
- 7. Mix with people you don't know.** Many events have walk-around networking followed by a sit-down meeting of some sort. During the walk-around, do talk to people you have met before to enhance your relationship, but sit with people you don't know in order to widen your network.

- 8. Talk to people who are standing alone.** People attend networking events to meet others. If someone is standing alone, that's the perfect opportunity to make a new contact. You might want to start the conversation by introducing yourself and asking if they regularly attend this meeting. Involve others in your conversation. They'll be grateful to you, and you just never know who they might be. Remember to use open and closed questions, to control the flow of information.
- 9. Give to get.** Focus on what you can do for others, not what they can do for you. Be comfortable with sharing information and don't look at the opposition as your enemy. They are just another player in your space, and could well be your next employer.
- 10. Follow up.** If you make a good connection with someone, send an email saying how much you enjoyed meeting them, after the event.
- 11. Cross-pollinate.** One size does not fit all and likewise one industry group will not expand your opportunities. As an example, lawyers just don't work for law firms. They work for banks, media organizations, fashion houses, etc. Think laterally, networking opportunities are all around you.
- 12. Legitimate follow up.** Once you have formed a relationship, look for opportunities to share or supply information. It helps the other party and keeps you on their radar.
- 13. Get involved.** Put your hand up, offer to be on the committee, sit on a panel or volunteer. If people see that you are supportive and committed in a voluntary industry role, then you will have greater appeal to them as a potential next hire. Rotary, Lions and Apex are all great networking opportunities and a great way to give back to the community.

Remember up to **60%** of jobs are never advertised! So if you're not networking, if you're not known and recognised as a value add, specialist in your field, then that great next career opportunity might go to someone else. Or not, if you're smart and start networking today.

Good luck in your next interview, James E Lynch