

10 Success Tips for Reluctant Networkers (part 2)

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In our first installment, we outlined concrete steps you may take to ease the strain of networking. Below are the remaining key steps to take:

6. Don't Spit.

"Spitting" in conversation is shoving your elevator pitch in a person's face - don't do it! Let your conversation-mate ask you questions about your business if he or she wants to.

A Bumper Sticker is a good thing to have - it's a one-liner that succinctly shares what you do without going into detail. "I design and manage large product databases for consumer-packaged-goods companies" is a bumper sticker. A self-description that takes 15 or 30 or 45 seconds is way too long, and unsuitable for one person to deliver to another person in the normal flow of human conversation.

7. Ask Questions.

In the same vein as interviewing (tip 5) our new acquaintances, asking them questions about themselves and their interests is a great way to learn new things and to build rapport. If you don't know a thing about metallurgy, don't be afraid to ask 'stupid' questions of the metallurgist standing next to you at the canape bar. People are normally happy to share what they know.

Asking questions of new acquaintances is my hands-down favorite way to get to know them. "I'm afraid I don't know a thing about [your profession] - can you tell me how it works?" is a great all-purpose question when you're out of your depth.

8. Wrap up.

Always end a conversation by thanking a person for his or her time, and expressing your admiration for the person. "I'm so glad I got to meet you - it's been lovely to learn about you!" is a pleasant way to part. If you feel like asking for a business card, by all means do it, but don't ask for it if you don't want it and plan to throw it away the minute you get a chance. Likewise, don't offer your business card to everyone you meet, just because it's a networking meeting.

If you seek further interaction, ask "Do you ever like to have coffee, or lunch?" rather than making a specific invitation. It is easy for a not-terribly-interested person to reply "My travel schedule makes it really difficult" thereby letting you know that you're barking up the wrong networking tree.

9. Send thanks.

The day after a networking event, write to the people you most enjoyed meeting and thank them for their sparkling conversation.

If you can manage it, send something of value along -- the link to an article that's relevant to your new friend's interests, for example.

10. Thank the organizer.

It is rare, and very pleasant, for an event organizer to receive a thank-you note or two from attendees the day after an event. Be one of the polite folks who takes time to write and thank the host for his or her time and effort.

If you want to get better at networking, offer to volunteer as a Greeter at the organization's next event. That should get you in the door for free and give you a good reason to talk with people!