



Networking Tips

Dale Kurow

When it comes to activities my clients dislike most, networking tops the list. From vice presidents on down, the lament I hear is: “I’m not good at it” or (my favorite) “I’m shy.” And I get this response from professionals who are otherwise at the top of their game!

So, I decided to write this e-booklet as a guide to networking. I’ve formatted it to offer tips for use **before, **during** and **after** a networking event. Some of these tips also apply to networking telephone calls. In writing the tips, I’ve drawn upon my own networking experiences, my years in human resources and in teaching business courses, as well as from several books, which I’ve mentioned at the end of this booklet.**

I hope you find these tips helpful. My advice is to get out there and network. All the tips in the world won't help unless you find the motivation to attend an event. But once you've decided to go, these tips can ease the process by increasing your self-confidence and optimizing the time you do spend networking.



The Tips

Before you go...

Ⓢ Extreme self-care.

Huh? Do something you love before you mingle; pamper yourself. Indulge in a massage, your favorite snack or a conversation with your best long-distance pal. Whatever floats your boat. The object here is to walk into that room or make that call feeling confident and primed.

@ Choose your outfit.

Wear what you feel your best in. Ideally, choose an outfit that has been road-tested. You can personalize your “look” by adding eye-catching accessories – an unusual tie, a great necklace or pin. Note for women: it’s best to wear a jacket with a lapel. Many events provide name tags that hang by a metal clip. If your jacket or top does not have a lapel or collar, you will end up with your name tag hanging from the hem of your jacket, and your name won’t be visible.

@ Add polish.

Go the extra mile to shine. Have a manicure, repair and shine your shoes, get a haircut or blow-dry. Polish your language as well. Eliminate colloquial words such as “thing” and “stuff.” Imprecise language will detract from your image.

🌀 **Get there early.**

You'll get to connect with others who are eager to network during the quieter time before the room fills. This pre-event phase provides an opportunity for a slightly longer conversation with a new contact. Another reason for arriving early is that you can choose a good seat for a breakfast or lunch presentation.

🌀 **Bring at least 10 business cards.**

This sounds like a no-brainer, but I've been at events where people didn't have cards. I will even go so far as to say, don't attend unless you bring cards. Even if you're out of work, it's easy to get cards printed with your name and contact information.

Ⓢ **Prepare yourself mentally.**

What are you going to talk about? You don't have to sound like Diane Sawyer, but you do need to be able to start a conversation. Talking about a current movie, your latest vacation or a best-seller is a good opener. It's especially important to have a few topics prepared in advance if you're intimidated by the thought of walking into a room full of strangers.

Ⓢ **Bring photos.**

Pictures of your kids or grandkids are wonderful conversation starters. I've seen a whole table of men and women connect by sharing pictures of their kids!

② What do you do?

Often at a smaller networking venue, you'll be asked to stand, give your name and briefly explain what you do. You need to be prepared with one or two memorable sentences. For example, when I am asked, I say, "I'm a career and executive coach, and I help people become more successful at their work, so they can face Mondays with a smile." Using your moment wisely can be a way for you to generate interest in you or your product/service.

🌀 Why are you going?

Get clear on your reason(s) for attending this event. Once you identify your goals, you'll be that much closer to realizing them. Let's suppose you'd like to develop leads for your business or network for a new job. You'll need to develop a brief synopsis of what you do and what makes you or your product/service unique.

Here are a couple of examples:

- (1) "I get media exposure for my clients. I only charge a fee if I actually make a placement. I'd like to expand my client base and would welcome any suggestions or leads you may have."

(2) “I’m a Human Resources professional who loves recruiting. In my last position, I was able to reduce recruitment costs by 40%. I’m seeking a position in which I could use those talents. Perhaps you know of companies that might benefit from my experience?”

This is a very straightforward approach that should be incorporated into your conversation only after you’ve established rapport. Rehearse this synopsis until you can present it with ease.

@ Building relationships.

Establishing and building relationships, not hard selling, is the key to successful networking. Be prepared to share your expertise, contacts and compassion

© **Is this the best venue?**

Decide which event(s) would make the most sense for you in terms of your goals. If you're unsure of an organization's appropriateness for you, attend one event as a guest. Then, ask yourself, how did you feel at the event? Were there like-minded people with whom you connected? Was the group open and welcoming to new members? I'd recommend that you attend no more than 1-2 events a month, especially when you're getting started.

While you're there...

@ **Name tags 101.**

The size of your name and the placement of your name tag are important. If you're not given a preprinted name tag, print your first and last name in black ink in large block letters. Always place your name tag near your right lapel, as most people will extend their right hand, and their eyes will catch your right side first. Using your business card as a name tag is not best, as your name will be too small to be read easily.

🌀 **Business cards 101.**

Make sure your cards are easily accessible. Put 10 cards in your pocket or in an attractive cardholder. Rummaging around and pulling out a wrinkled card is unprofessional. A suggestion: place your cards in the badge holder behind your name tag.

🌀 **Offering your card.**

Offer your card only if you've been asked or if it seems appropriate to exchange cards. Never hand out your card when you're first introduced or after just a very brief conversation, unless you've promised to share a lead or specific information.

② **Go for the white-knuckle person.**

If you're looking for a person as eager to connect as you are, look for one who's alone and hovering on the fringes.

Extend your hand and maintain eye contact as you introduce yourself.

② **Play the host.**

If you've arrived early, you can select a good table and invite people to sit with you. Most people attend events alone and are flattered to be asked to join a table.

② **Go for quality connections.**

I am put off by the networker who flits from one person to another. This person may collect 20 business cards in one evening, but truly connect with no one. Better to aim for 2 or 3 meaningful conversations. When you take the time to show genuine interest in one person and are truly focused on them, you've established rapport. Which brings me to the next tip.

② **Attentive listening.**

When it's your turn to listen, focus on capturing the person's every word and facial expression. Attentive listening is a great way to get the spotlight off you. This is particularly effective for those who have the jitters about attending an event. People will remember you more for listening to them than for what you've said. People love to talk about themselves!

Ⓢ **Pausing.**

One tip I've found useful is to pause before speaking after someone has completed his or her thought. While the pressure might be on to jump in with an immediate response, pausing serves several purposes. First, it lets you compose your thoughts. Second, your brief silence suggests you are carefully digesting what the person has shared. As a bonus, your fellow networker will feel that his/her comments have been heard.

Ⓢ **Negativity is a turnoff.**

Allowing yourself to be drawn into a "woe is me" conversation is a waste of time. These dialogues go nowhere and end up with both parties feeling down. If you've met a person like this, it's best to change the subject or politely excuse yourself.

④ **Consistent eye contact.**

I've made this a separate tip because this is my pet peeve. The fastest way to turn someone off at an event is to let your eyes wander when you're in conversation with that person. It's rude and disrespectful. Even if a herd of elephants walks into the room, your eyes need to remain on the person speaking. If you're serious about creating relationships, you need to be focused on the person talking (even if you're bored), rather than scoping out your next prospect.

② **Be helpful.**

The best way to grow a new relationship is to offer to help. So, you might want to approach a networking conversation from the standpoint of offering assistance: what contact or information can I share with this person? If you take the time to find out what s/he needs and try to help, you will be remembered. Most people will feel the need to overrespond to your offer.

🌀 **Ask for help.**

If you've approached the contact first and offered your help, that person will most likely reciprocate. As mentioned in a previous tip, before you go to an event, you need to prepare for this question. It's best to say that you'd like to explore, or get information about, a certain company, job or topic. People are more willing to share their contacts and information if they feel they are in a mutually beneficial relationship. Thus the need to be helpful first.

🌀 **Plan your next meeting.**

Pave the way by saying you'd like to keep in touch, and/or suggest a time to continue the conversation.

After you've gone...

@ Remembering your contacts.

Right after meeting a new contact, or as soon afterwards as possible, jot down something that will remind you of this person on the back of their card. Did this person have kids? What was your conversation about? It's important to record a memorable aspect of your conversation, so you're able to refer to it later. This can also be the entrée for your follow-up discussion. Also, remember to jot down the name of the event and the event date.

@ Creative ways of connecting.

Finding ways to keep in touch is the key to building the relationship. Refer back to your notes on their business cards for ideas. Sharing a helpful tip or an article is a good approach. You can subscribe to web sites that will send you articles on current topics that you can forward to others. Two free sites that provide business-related articles are Execunet (<http://www.execunet.com>) and The Wall Street Journal's on-line Career Journal (<http://www.CareerJournal.com>).

@ Follow up immediately.

The next day, send an e-mail or make a quick call. You want to grow the relationship, so take the first step.

☺ Do a recap.

How would you rate your networking skills at this event? What would you do differently next time? What opportunities didn't you take advantage of? What did you do well? Giving yourself honest feedback will help improve your proficiency.

A final tip....

- ☺ Networking at an event is like performing. You need to be "on" and projecting your best self. Often, there is a letdown afterwards. (Or a feeling of relief!) So, I treat myself afterwards to a chocolate bar and HBO. Whatever your treat of choice, a post-event reward is in order, especially for networking novices.

Suggested Reading...

Click on the  for more information about these books.

-  *Make Your Contacts Count*
by Anne Baber & Lynne Waymon

-  *How Winners Do It*
by Michael W. Mercer

-  *How to Work A Room*
by Susan Roane

-  *The Secrets of Savvy Networking*
by Susan Roane

© 2002 Dale R. Kurow. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or medium without the express written permission of the author.

Dale Kurow, M.S.

Career and Executive Coach

Tel: 212/787-6097

Fax: 212/787-7627

Email: dkurow@nyc.rr.com

<http://www.dalekurow.com>

Dale Kurow is a career and executive coach who helps individuals find success and personal enrichment at their vocations and who works with corporations to maximize the potential of valuable employees.

Sign up for the FREE Career Essentials e-mail Newsletter at:

http://www.dalekurow.com/enewsletter_signup.html

Designed to transform the way you think about your career.

