

5 Networking Mistakes People Make

BY ROBYN HENDERSON



People often miss networking opportunities basically because they are not prepared. Failing to plan they say, is planning to fail. So let's look at the 5 main networking mistakes people make.

1. No Business Cards

Picture yourself having a frantic day at work, you dash to the networking function only to find you have forgotten your business cards. Even if you meet "Ideal Prospect No 1" at this event, writing a phone number on a

serviette or coaster is bound to give the wrong impression.

Solution: Place business cards NOW in your wallet, car and pockets of all your suits. Never ever attend a networking event without business cards.

2. Network Only At Business Networking Events

Many people see networking as something that they just do at specific business networking events. They attend a Chamber of Commerce event and network then on their return to their office, they stop networking. Next month back to the Chamber and they are networking again. Rather than considering the unlimited networking opportunities that may crop up at their social, cultural or sporting groups. People want to do business with people they know, like and trust. Who do they trust more than the person they play touch football, tennis or run with? Some people think it is inappropriate to mix business and pleasure. As a result, they continually become annoyed with their peers when they learn they have gone to a competitor to provide a service they personally could have offered.

Solution: Master networkers see networking as a life skill not just something they do when they want something. Consider viewing networking as a skill that you live 24 x 7. Start by treating people the way you want to be treated. In Asia business cards are called name cards. If we think of our business cards as name cards, this takes a huge amount of pressure away from the giving of cards. When you give a card to a friend or new contact, whether it is in a business or social setting, you may say "Here's my card, if I can ever help any of your friends just give me a call." In this way you are not putting pressure on them at all.

3. Keeping Score—Cards

Poor networkers keep scorecards on the favours they do for others. "I gave a lead to Fred last month and he still owes me big time." With this attitude they will never expand their networks and this attitude could cripple your friendship with Fred. You see, Fred may never be in a position to give you a lead, however, through your help, he has been able to help another person, who

helps another and so the chain of networking grows. It is not about one-for-one favours. One of the universal laws at the basis of networking is to give without expectations—treat people the way you would like to be treated.

Solution: Iven Misner, founder of BNI (Business Networking International, a breakfast referral group) says "Give without remembering and receive without forgetting." If you are still a little sceptical, why not adapt this philosophy for the next 30 days and just see what happens—you may be pleasantly surprised with the outcomes!

4. Don't Talk To Strangers

Your mother told you when you were a small child, not to talk to strangers. Now when you attend a business or social networking event, the room is filled with strangers and you still follow your mum's advice. One of the worst mistakes people make when networking is to attend a networking event with three or four of their workmates and sit or stand with them all night. Because you know them well and feel comfortable in their company, why would you bother to move out of your comfort zone and talk to a stranger who may not even end up being a prospect?

Solution: Move out of your comfort zone!! By all means arrive with one or two peers. However, prior to arriving discuss your strategies for the night and agree that you will definitely circulate and aim to meet new people within say ten minutes of your arrival. Your individual aim may be to have a quality conversation with three of four people and you will not reconnect with each other until you have done so. If someone in the group is not overly confident, take them under your wing and show them how it's done.

5. Don't Value Yourself

Many young networkers are mixing at business events with people who are sometimes 10 and 20 years older than them. Alternately they could be around the same age group, but have more experience in this specific industry. They instantly feel at a disadvantage, consider they have nothing to contribute because they are not as experienced in their profession and virtually clam up when

it comes to conversation. Even worse, if the subject comes round to a topic they know something about, they spend so much time filtering their own thoughts about whether their comment is even worth mentioning, that they end up having a miserable time and miss many opportunities.

Solution: Start valuing yourself today. You deserve to be at the event, you have bought your ticket, as have they. Although you may be younger or less experienced, don't let that stop you expressing an opinion. Prepare a couple of questions prior to arriving. Interesting people are interested in others—that's what makes them interesting. You have many life experiences that are of equal value to anyone in the room; today you just don't think they are. When you value and respect yourself, others do the same.

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