

How Not to Network

Get-togethers hosted by professional or membership organisations can be a great way to build relationships with other businesses and create mutual opportunities. But facing a sea of anonymous faces can be a nerve-wracking prospect, even for seasoned networkers. That feeling of insecurity can tempt people into five common networking 'no-no's:

- 1. They latch on to one person all evening or speak only to people they know*
It feels nice and safe at the time but is a wasted opportunity. Moving on, politely, after 5-10 minutes is accepted networking practice: "There's someone I need to speak to; let's catch up later" is a good break-away phrase. Touch base with old associates but aim to meet new people, too.
- 2. They hand out business cards like confetti...*
...and will be remembered as a whirlwind passing through! Far better to wait until you're asked for your card (shows they're genuinely interested) or take the initiative and ask for *their* card – whereupon most people will ask for yours in return. Don't forget to keep your business cards in easy reach.
- 3. They talk about themselves all evening*
Another wasted opportunity! You already know about you. Another 'sin' is to glance at a name badge and swiftly dismiss the person as unworthy of attention. Be genuinely interested in others and explore mutual interest and connections. Everyone loves a good listener and you'll be surprised who you meet.
- 4. They turn a conversation into a sales pitch*
This is not the occasion for a hard sell. Instead begin to develop a relationship and arrange to meet up to find out whether they need your services or how you might help each other.
- 5. They don't bother to follow up any of any of their new contacts*
Life's too short to waste valuable time going to events if you are not going to make good on your contacts with a call or email.

Successful networkers know who they want to meet and why, plan their time carefully, and invest in building relationships. They approach networking with a long-term view rather than looking for short-term gain and adopt the belief that you have to give before you can receive.

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