



TOP 10 TIPS

FOR NON-AWKWARD NETWORKING

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NEXT MARKETING

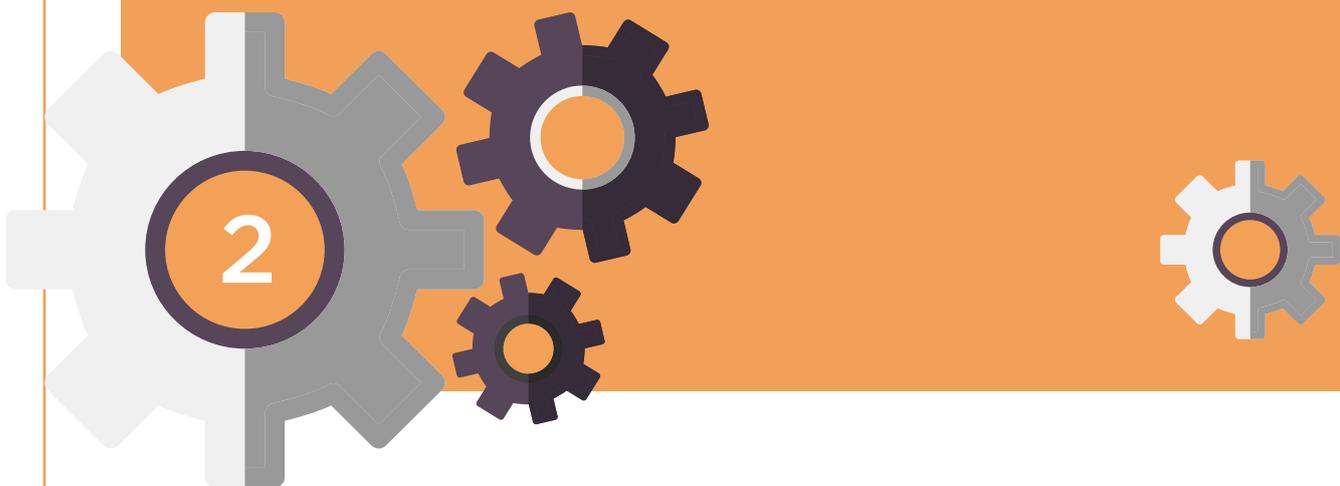
INTRODUCTION

Networking. A word that fills some people with anticipation and excitement and others with trepidation and fear. There is no doubt that networking can be extremely beneficial, whether you are looking to promote a business, advance your career or build professional contacts. The catch is that it can also be scary, especially if you are not a natural extrovert or you haven't had much practice at it.

Whether you are at a networking event, an industry soirée or the office Christmas party, combining socialising with work can certainly lead to some awkward situations. Drinking too much, inadvertently offending someone you really want to impress or standing around the edges of the room feeling like a loner can all be damaging to your reputation, not to mention your self-esteem.

Because networking offers so many opportunities, it would be a shame to miss out on all the benefits that getting out and meeting people can have for your business or career because you feel anxious or intimidated at the thought of attending networking parties. This guide is here to help you smooth the path to confident networking and avoid some common awkward situations that you might encounter.

With a few tips and tricks, not to mention plenty of practice, it's possible for even the most nervous networker to overcome awkwardness and learn to network like a pro. Whether you are a happy, experienced networker or you're just getting started, the following ten tips can help you avoid some common networking pitfalls and get the most out of your next networking event.



TIP #1

— KNOW YOURSELF —

Are you a natural networker or do you wilt at the thought of walking into a room full of strangers? Different personality types will often approach networking completely differently and being aware of your own personal strengths and weaknesses can help you develop a solid networking strategy.

- >> If you are a **NATURAL EXTROVERT** you may find it easy to approach people and engage in small talk but it may be harder for you to translate this into meaningful, lasting relationships. You may want to focus on following up with people you talk to at your next networking event, so you can further develop the relationships you start.
- >> If you are **MORE INTROVERTED** you may excel at one on one conversations and building those meaningful relationships but find the small talk and idea of approaching people more of a challenge. Next time you attend an industry party, you might want to prepare a few different strategies for introducing yourself and think about possible topics of conversation (more about both of these later).

No matter whether you are extroverted, introverted, quirky or down to earth, it's important to be genuine when you're at a networking event. People can tell if you're being fake and this won't do you any favours in the long term. Remember, you are there to meet people and make friends, it's not a job interview, so relax and let your personality show. You never know, you may even find some kindred spirits among the crowd.



TIP #2

— WHEN IT COMES TO GREETINGS — FOLLOW THE OTHER PERSON'S LEAD

Everyone has different ideas of appropriate personal contact when they meet someone new. Some people like to handshake, others kiss on the cheek and others even hug.

- >> **GO WITH IT** When you are a handshake person it can be a bit confronting to be pulled into a hug but pushing the other person away or trying to convert the hug into a polite hand grasp will only make the situation ten times more awkward. It's best to just go with it. Similarly, if you are a touchy feely type person and someone offers their hand on a first greeting, don't pull them into a big bear hug, even if a handshake seems standoffish to you.
- >> **LET THE OTHER PERSON INITIATE** To avoid awkward encounters and accidentally encroaching on other people's personal space boundaries, it's best to take your cue from the other person when trying to determine the appropriate manner of greeting. Wait for them to initiate before diving in and you can be confident that you're not going to get off to a bad start by being too friendly or not friendly enough.
- >> **DON'T GET TOO CLOSE** After the initial introductions are over and conversation is resumed, be mindful of personal space and boundaries. Nobody likes a close talker and if you stand too close to people it can really put them off and make them feel uncomfortable. Similarly, standing too far away can make it difficult to hear each other and could make you appear aloof and distant.

If you aren't sure what an appropriate distance is, do some research about personal proximity (an arm's length away is a good minimum for someone you don't have a close relationship with) and be mindful of distances, es



TIP #3

— DITCH THE WINGMAN — (OR WOMAN)

Bringing a friend, colleague or your partner to a networking event can seem like the perfect way to calm those nerves but having someone else there can make you appear **LESS APPROACHABLE** and also mean you are **LESS MOTIVATED** to go and start conversations with new people

Nobody wants to be a loner hovering around the buffet but bringing a friend along for moral support can hold you back when it comes to making new industry contacts and getting out of your comfort zone to talk to people. Other people are far more likely to strike up conversation with you if you are standing alone in the bar queue (or hovering by the buffet) than if you are standing in a group of people who clearly know each other or having an intense one on one conversation with your partner.

Still not convinced? Think about how you feel approaching a group or even two people who are deep in conversation. Do you feel like you're interrupting? Find yourself standing there awkwardly looking for a way to jump in to the conversation without being rude? Then if they don't immediately notice you, you can end up hovering a bit too long and looking like a creepy stalker (which brings us on to our next tip). It's not a good scenario and if you want people to feel like they can actually approach you, one that's best avoided by **GOING ALONE AND CIRCULATING FREQUENTLY.**



TIP #4

— BREACK INTO GROUP — CONVERSATIONS WITHOUT BEING RUDE

We've all been there, hovering around the edges of a group, trying to find a way in to the conversation without barging in and interrupting. After a while it starts to get a bit strange, especially if nobody notices you standing there. Here are some tips:

- >> **TARGET SMALLER GROUPS** Unless everyone in the room is talking in groups, try to target people on their own or who are talking in a pair rather than those standing around in threes or fours. It's far less intimidating to walk up to two people and introduce yourself than to a big group of people, and a smaller group is more likely to notice you so you won't have to wait on the outskirts for too long.

- >> **BE AWARE OF BODY LANGUAGE** If people are engrossed in a conversation they may be irritated at being interrupted, however engaging your opening gambit is. Before approaching a group or a couple of people talking, take a look at their body language. Are they leaning towards each other and intently focused? If so it may be best to leave them alone. When considering who to try to talk to, look for signs that people in the group are not focused on the conversation. If they are leaning back or glancing around the room it can be a good indicator that they are bored and would be receptive to an introduction.

- >> **BE CONFIDENT AND BRIEF** Rather than standing beside a group of people and waiting interminably to be noticed, when you find the right moment, jump in with something like 'sorry for barging in,' or 'Hi, I don't mean to interrupt,' and explain that you just want to introduce yourself to a few people. Most people will probably be there to meet new people as well, and chances are you will get a positive reception. If they seem uninterested in talking to you or resentful of the intrusion, you can extricate yourself by politely saying, "Great to meet you! I'm just going to say hello over there," and walk off without causing any offence.

TIP #5

INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO PEOPLE YOU — ADMIRE BUT DON'T BE CREEPY —

So you've seen that person you have secretly hero worshiped for months or even years across the room but don't know how to approach them? Want to tell them how awesome they are but don't want to come across like a gushing groupie?

It is possible to introduce yourself to someone you admire without wetting your pants in fear or coming across as a complete weirdo. Here are some tips that might help:

- >> **DON'T GUSH.** Keep compliments short and to the point and avoid embarrassing people by heaping praises on them for minutes at a time. Not everyone is comfortable accepting praise so keep it short and sweet then move on with the conversation. Ideally the person who is receiving the compliment should be able to smile and say, 'thanks.' If they are blushing or stammering you've probably gone too far.
- >> **FIND SOMETHING YOU HAVE IN COMMON.** If you have any common professional experiences, mutual acquaintances or even if you just like their outfit or shoes this can be a great ice breaker and a way into a normal conversation.
- >> **DON'T MONOPOLISE THEM.** Remember that if they are as awesome as you think they are, there will be other people wanting to talk to them too. Keep the conversation to a few minutes and be respectful of their time. You don't want your idol to remember you as the annoying person who they couldn't escape from!

Although it can be completely terrifying to walk over to someone you look up to and introduce yourself, it can really pay off and the more you do it, the more comfortable you will be.



TIP #6

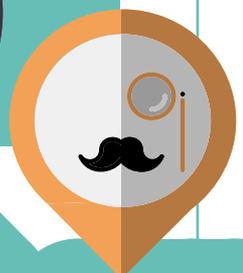
INTRODUCE YOURSELF AND OTHERS — THE NON-AWKWARD WAY —

So Whether you are introducing yourself to someone you don't know, or two strangers to each other, learning how to make introductions can help smooth the way for you to meet new people and network with confidence. Introductions can be awkward, especially if you don't know how to go about them and how much information to give.

Here are a few suggestions that can help you introduce yourself and other people with ease.

- >> **USE YOUR FIRST NAME** unless you have previously had contact with the person you are introducing yourself to. You can introduce yourself to strangers with first and last name but usually it's less formal and sounds more down to earth and casual to just say, "hi, I'm Jo". If you have previously worked with the person you are talking to or have chatted online you can use first and last name to jog their memory of who you actually are.
- >> **IF YOU HAVE MET THE PERSON BEFORE, BRIEFLY MENTION THE CONTEXT.** Don't assume someone will remember you. Jogging their memory as to who you are and how they know you will save embarrassment and awkwardness if you don't immediately jump straight to their recollection.
- >> **WHEN YOU ARE INTRODUCING OTHER PEOPLE** provide a brief sentence or two of information to help ease them into the conversation (preferably something positive).

When you are introducing yourself, no matter how well known you are in your industry, always assume that the person you are introducing yourself to doesn't know who you are. This saves awkwardness and embarrassment if they genuinely haven't heard of you, and if they have, it makes you look down to earth and modest which can only be a good thing.



TIP #7

— DON'T PITCH AT PARTIES —

So Even though you may be at an industry networking event, if it's a social occasion, don't talk endlessly about work. This may seem counterproductive, when you are there to promote yourself, but remember that your main objective is to meet people and make friends. The best way to do this is to keep it light and share information about yourself (but not too much). Although you may find that work enters the conversation naturally, try to avoid coming across like you're interviewing people or pitching. Hopefully you have some other interests you can bring up, whether it's your Game of Thrones addiction or passion for Moroccan cooking.

At the same time, be sure to avoid talking about anything that could cause offence or which is overly personal. A networking party is not the place to divulge the details of your divorce or tell dirty jokes. If you're looking for some safe topics of conversation, you can try:

- >> **TELEVISION SHOWS AND MOVIES.** Always a good topic of conversation and a great social leveller.
- >> **TRAVEL** If you've been anywhere interesting or someone you're talking to has, sharing travel stories can be a great way to break the ice.
- >> **PLANS FOR THE WEEKEND/HOLIDAYS.** Anything from weekends away to kids' adventures.
- >> **CURRENT EVENTS AND INTERESTING NEWS STORIES** (although it's best to steer clear of politics, religion or anything too controversial).

Along the same note, be sparing with your business cards. The aim of most networking events is not to give your card to the maximum number of people possible, it's to socialise and have fun. If you get into a spontaneous work related discussion and feel like it would be appropriate to hand over your card, do so and then move the conversation on to other topics.

TIP #8

— FIND A GOOD EXIT STRATEGY —

So There is little in life that is more painful than being trapped in a conversation with someone when one or both of you clearly want to get out. If you are going to be attending a networking event, it pays to think about your exit strategy ahead of time so if you find yourself in this situation you can end the conversation quickly and without causing offence.

Nothing is more awkward than standing with someone trying to make stilted conversation or even worse, in silence because neither of you want to appear rude, and you can't think of a polite escape route.

There are plenty of different excuses you can use to get out of a conversation. You may be able to think of some spontaneously, depending on the situation and what is appropriate. Some good ones to have up your sleeve include:

- >> **GOING TO GET A DRINK.** If you are worried about looking like a raging alcoholic, you can always go to the bar for a glass of water instead of another wine. Going to get a drink is one of the easiest ways to get out of a conversation which isn't going anywhere (unless you have a full glass in your hand).
- >> **DISCARDING SOMETHING.** Chances are you are holding something that you may need to get rid of at some stage, whether a jacket, napkin, empty cup, laptop, piece of rubbish or anything else. Having something to get rid of can give you an instant reason to walk away under the auspices of looking for a bin or a cloakroom.



Tip #8: continued on next page

TIP #8

— FIND A GOOD EXIT STRATEGY —

- >> **SPOTTING A FRIEND.** This is a great excuse to leave a conversation. Whether you need to go and find a friend you saw earlier or you happen to spot someone you know across the room, don't be afraid to use your friends to get you out of an awkward conversation.
- >> **YOUR PHONE.** Your phone can give you plenty of opportunities to exit awkward situations. Whether you need to check for an urgent email, you notice a missed call that you just have to return or a client crisis erupts, a smartphone can be your best friend at parties and get you smoothly out of a myriad of uncomfortable situations.

There are plenty of reasons to leave a conversation. You are only limited by your imagination and there's no reason you shouldn't be able to extricate yourself gracefully from all but the most persistent of talkers.



TIP #9

— DON'T DRINK TOO MUCH —

Although you are at a party and there to have fun, **BE WARY OF HAVING TOO MUCH FUN. YOU DO STILL WANT TO MAKE A RELATIVELY PROFESSIONAL IMPRESSION.** Watching you dancing on the tables is a sight you should probably save for close friends and family. Networking events are meant to be sociable and relaxed but don't forget these are people who you may want to one day hire you in a work context.

If you do decide to have a drink or two, don't try to get everyone around you drunk as this can make you look immature and it can be awkward if they decline. Rounds of shots are better done with friends, especially if you want to be taken seriously the next time that big client contract comes up for grabs.

You don't have to choke down the Sauvignon Blanc if wine isn't your thing. Interesting drink choices can be a great conversation starter and make you stand out among the crowd although it's probably best to avoid the tequila slammers and stick to something more grown up.

If you're not drinking alcohol and you want to avoid endless questions and people trying to buy you drinks, you can always fake it. Try ordering a soda water with lime which looks like a gin and tonic or a coke (looks like rum and coke).



TIP #10

— KNOW WHEN TO LEAVE —

Nothing is more awkward than standing around after the lights have come on and the cleaners have started picking up the rubbish. If you are among the last people left at a networking party, it's time to go home. Making a good impression means looking like you have a home to go to and you are in control of your life and this means leaving before the lights come on.

Leaving early doesn't mean you have to end the great conversations you have started.

FOLLOWING UP AFTER A NETWORKING EVENT IS CRUCIAL IF YOU WANT THE CONTACTS YOU MADE TO DEVELOP INTO MEANINGFUL AND POTENTIALLY BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIPS.

Make a note of everyone you spoke to at the event and be sure to follow up with a quick email a few days later telling them how you enjoyed meeting them. Refer briefly to the conversation you had and invite them to keep in touch. People are busy and you might not hear back from everyone but chances are you will hear back from at least a few and you can then arrange further meetings in the future.

CONCLUSION

Networking can benefit your business and/or your career in a number of different ways. By attending networking events you can gain access to opportunities you just wouldn't have known about otherwise, meet contacts who can help you in your career, or just have a fun evening chatting to interesting, like-minded people.

We hope these suggestions will help you feel more confident at your next networking event, and smooth over some of the awkwardness that we all experience from time to time, no matter how confident we are. Knowing how to avoid some common pitfalls can help you feel less nervous and more self-assured to get out there and meet people as you grow your business or career.

Networking can be intimidating to start with but chances are it will get easier as you get more experience and gain confidence. We hope this e-book was a good starting point for you, whether you are an experienced networker looking to hone your skills or a complete beginner.

There's no need to be intimidated by networking events. With plenty of practice and a few tricks up your sleeve, you may even start to enjoy them. Where will your next job or client come from? Maybe it will be someone you meet at your next networking event.

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