



## Networking Tips

From *Great Connections: Small Talk and Networking for Businesspeople* and *52 Ways To Re-connect, Follow Up, & Stay in Touch . . . When You Don't Have Time To Network* by Anne Baber and Lynne Waymon, co-founders of **Contacts Count**.

### **IT'S NOT WHO YOU KNOW**

People say, cynically, "It's not what you know, it's who you know." They see networking as an opportunity to use people. That's not the way to do it. What's really important is WHO KNOWS YOU. To network effectively, use professional and community organizations to showcase your skills to the people who count. Get visible.

### **THERE ARE NO FAST-FOOD NETWORKS**

"I tried networking last Wednesday, and it doesn't work!" wails Ernie Entrepreneur. Of course not. Networks are made up of relationships that are nurtured over time. Rule of thumb: It takes six months to create a networking relationship with someone. So start now.

### **THEY DON'T WANT TO TALK TO ME**

If that thought runs through your mind when you begin to join a group of people who are talking, you're back at the eighth grade dance. Joining groups of people who are talking is one of people's greatest fears. Advice: Touch someone's elbow, the circle will open. Make eye contact with the speaker. If there's a lull when you arrive, it's because the group is tired of its topic of conversation and needs you to start off in another direction. So be prepared with a question or comment.

### **YOU MUST LEARN HOW TO SMALL TALK TO NETWORK**

Expert networkers are also skillful small talkers. But, it's a myth that people are born with the gift of gab -- or without it. Anybody can learn to small talk and to use small talk to create valuable networking relationships.

### **WAIT! DON'T HAND OUT THAT BUSINESS CARD TOO SOON**

Going to a networking event and handing out lots of business cards is a waste of time. Instead, use small talk to discover a reason to exchange cards. Say, "I'd like to send you a copy of that article on marketing to people under 30. May I have your card?" Then write on the back of it what you have promised to do and follow through promptly.

## **YOU CAN'T BUY A NETWORK**

Often people think they have a network because they belong to a lot of organizations. Not so. You can fill out the membership forms, pay your dues, receive the newsletter, and even go to events, and still not have a network. You only have a network when you create active relationships that are mutually advantageous.

## **CREATE A ROSTER**

Who are the key people in related businesses who could benefit from exchanging leads with you? An accountant, for example, might focus on bankers, lawyers, insurance agents, and stockbrokers. Create "customer common" alliances with other businesspeople. Refer your customers to them and get referrals in return. This only works if you trust the other businesspeople to treat your customers well and if the other businesspeople trust you also.

## **JOIN UP**

Select organizations to join carefully. Choose five or six diverse arenas where you will be able to connect with people you want to meet. Consider professional organizations, volunteer groups, the Chamber of Commerce, a health club, your church or synagogue, parents of your kid's soccer teammates.

## **GET INTO NAMES**

People rush introductions to get on to "the good stuff." In networking, names are "good stuff." Teach people your name by providing a way for them to remember, "I'm Bob Jones. When you think about keeping up with the Joneses, think of me. I'm a financial planner." Learn other people's names by lingering longer in the name game. Chat about names before you move on to other topics.

## **SAY WHAT YOU DO**

Forget your title. Find a dramatic way to explain what product or service you provide. Instead of "I'm president of Billing Services," say, "I get the bugs out of your bills." To respond effectively to the question, "What do you do?" create a 10-word sentence that tells what you do best. Then, follow that sentence with a vivid example that provides evidence of your expertise.

## **GO FOR THE CONNECTION, NOT THE CARDBOARD**

Exchange business cards only after you've figured out a good reason to do so. Don't wander around handing out your card to anyone who crosses your path. Be able to say, when you give your card, "Here's my card so you can call me next week."

## **FOLLOW UP**

Networking events are places to make plans to get together later. Find people you want to get to know better, exchange cards, follow up with a call to set an appointment or make plans for lunch.

## **ATTRACT PEOPLE**

Get visible in an organization. Volunteer for an activity or job that shows off your best skills and spotlights your business capabilities.

### **GIVE FIRST AND FREELY**

In networking, the ball's always in your court. It's up to you to take the first step -- and the next step -- to build relationships with your contacts. Listen to discover what information and resources they need, and provide it. If you feel like you're giving more than you are getting, you are networking the right way.

### **KNOW WHAT YOU WANT**

Before attending a networking event, figure out exactly what information you're looking for. Make a list of problems you're trying to solve, resources you need, information you want. If you know what you want, you'll find it --maybe in your next conversation.

### **SAY THANKS**

Come up with imaginative ways to appreciate people who help you -- flowers, tickets, a sample of a product your company makes or a service you provide, a contribution to a charity. Send a handwritten note, a cartoon, an article.

### **IMAGINE THE FUTURE**

End conversations assuming that your contact will be part of your network for years to come. Then cultivate that relationship. Work on developing trust and credibility -- the essentials of networking relationships. To develop a mutually beneficial networking relationship will take six to eight meetings. Figure out how to make those occasions pay off, not only for yourself, but for your contact.

### **TEACH PEOPLE ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS**

Networking isn't about taking, it's about teaching. Use every opportunity to teach people about your character and competence. That's the way to develop the trust that underlies all effective networking relationships.

Compliments of Marcia Hall, the *Reputation Pro* with **Reputation COUNTS**, who is a Certified **Contacts Count** Presenter, helping you develop your most powerful asset - **your personal reputation**. To learn more about building your networking skills, please visit <http://www.reputationcounts.com/networking>