

METRO CANADA

Kavita Gosyne

Beat those networking fears

There you are with your sweaty palms and fidgeting. You are expected to mingle with people you don't really know. Instead of seeing this as an opportunity to socialize with colleagues and possibly make strides in your career, you scan the room for a familiar face, but cannot find one. Not knowing what to do, you find a corner to disappear into. Sound familiar?

While we all know career building is not only about how much you know but who you know, for some of us, myself included, networking doesn't come naturally. If you consider yourself antisocial, these tips may help.

Marcia Hall, author of *Navigating Newbie-ism: 12 Simple Ways to Thrive in Your First Job and Career*, says antisocial behaviour can range from shunning others, acting hostile or simply declining invitations from co-workers.

"At networking events, you may stand by yourself the entire evening or never smile or make eye contact," she says. "Other people may then perceive you to be aloof, unfriendly or antisocial. Once you get this reputation, it's hard to change it."

Michael Salmon, founder of networking training firm M. Salmon & Associates, says setting realistic objectives is an important part of coming out of your shell.

"Set an objective of meeting three or four new people at a function," he says.

He also suggests preparing icebreaker questions such as: Do you know anyone else here? What brings you here?

"Think about having an 'it moment' pitch ready so when someone says 'Tell me about yourself' you are ready," says Salmon.

He suggests having a short response since you have only 20 to 30 seconds to capture someone's attention.

"Networking is all about creating and building mutually beneficial relationships," says Hall. "You must be willing to help and give to others to be successful in networking. If you aren't approachable, this can certainly affect both your networking and career goals."

Everyone feels some degree of anxiousness when they are expected to mingle with people they have never met. Having a positive attitude will make you more approachable.

"The key to attracting people is your attitude. Make sure it is positive even if you feel a bit anxious," says Hall. "Also, remember that most people welcome conversation. Seek

out someone standing alone, try to establish eye contact as you walk toward the person, and then smile and extend your hand. Have a conversational opener in mind to use.”

Lastly, remember networking is a two-way street says Salmon. “Think about how you can give back and help others.”

Kavita Gosyne, 26, is a young struggling journalism graduate. She writes about her transition from student to employee and the issues she faces such as office politics.

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networking tips from marcia hall

- Pick an event to attend that has a topic that will interest you.
- Decide to introduce yourself to someone new as quickly as you can upon arriving. That will help you start meeting new people. If you come early, it won't be so overwhelming because fewer people will be in the room.
- Volunteer to help at the event. Playing the host role gives you a reason to talk with others.