

## An Introduction to Networking

Going to trade shows, conferences and other gatherings can be an exciting opportunity to meet people and network within a given industry. It can also be intimidating, as not everyone feels completely comfortable working a room.

There are some simple things you can do to prepare for an event that will help you socialize more easily and meet people more readily. Consider these easy and helpful steps:

**1. Select a Person in the Room** - when you enter a room try to select one person you want to begin a conversation with, sort of to get the ball rolling. Try to choose someone you have an interest in meeting, but not someone already surrounded by people waiting to engage him or her in conversation. Turn on your charm, work up your gall, and go over and introduce yourself. Remember, he or she is there to meet people too, so this is not as awkward or uncomfortable as it may seem.

**2. Make Conversation** - beyond your introduction - which should be short and give the other person the reason why they might want to be talking with you - you need to quickly shift into conversation. It's usually safe to steer the conversation toward the individual by asking questions about his company and their products. This gets the other person talking about something he or she is passionate about, and at the same time offers you great openings to discuss your products and company by building on what he or she has said. For example, in discussing their product, the person may talk about a great benefit it offers. This gives you the chance to say "interesting to hear you say that. My company has an add on to your product that makes it even more compelling. We should talk about it sometime. By saying this you are introducing the idea, not taking the floor away from the other person, and also not appearing to aggressive.

**3. Stay up on Current Affairs** - reading the local daily newspaper while attending a conference or trade show is highly recommended. Chances are that a great deal of the small talk is going to revolve around recent events. Make sure you have enough information to discuss the issues with some competence, but avoid giving your personal opinions on matters that are controversial. If you are asked your opinion about something controversial make an effort to answer by using third party opinions, such as, "I have a friend who thinks....," or, "I was reading an article this week that said...".

**4. Stay up on Industry Affairs** - if people aren't talking about the latest scandal, war or movie, then they are talking about events in the industry. Make sure you read all industry newsletters and press reports prior to attending the event, and that you know the opinions of the leading industry opinion makers.

**5. Use Humor (Appropriately)** - humor can bring people to together and make people lighten up a bit. It's an excellent tool for breaking the ice...provided it is used properly. Don't tell jokes if you're bad at it, and don't tell jokes that are sexual in nature. You don't know how the other person will react. The best jokes are those that reveal the human condition. Jokes that are a bit self-deprecating are good too, as they often show that the teller is a person who takes risks. It's important to note, that while you can poke fun at yourself, it is generally a bad idea to poke fun at someone else.

**6. Be a Good Listener** - People don't talk when you are not listening attentively. Being a passive listener sends the message that you are not completely interested in what the person is saying. Being an active listener shows respect and interest. There are some ways you can show you are listening such as making eye contact, nodding, smiling, asking relevant questions, presenting a receptive pose (body language), and relaying stories that are of the same topic.

There are talkers and non-talkers, people who are shy and people who are just plain uninterested in engaging you in conversation. Don't be shaken by the less than successful encounters. Everyone has a few of them at every gathering. Still, by following the easy steps offered here, you can improve your networking skills and establish a better and more compelling encounter with the people you want to meet.