

# SIX PROVEN WAYS TO BECOME AN EXPERT BUSINESS NETWORKER

the luxury of talking to people at length about any subject that arises during the course of your conversation. During a typical professional event, you should be talking to as many people as possible.

Networking is the same as dating. Just as a date is a chance at a new relationship with long term potential, each networking opportunity is a chance to forge a new long-term business relationship. So step away from the coffee urn and water cooler and make those connections, even if connection-making is not something you come by naturally.

## 1 DEVELOP A PERSONAL NETWORKING ROADMAP

The path to making long-term and sustained connections starts with doing your homework. And the key to your homework is research and plan. Grab a pen and a piece of paper or use your favorite software program to make three lists.

Make one list of individuals you need to meet. Be specific, identifying first and last names, organizations, titles, and other information you determine important. On the second list, identify the types of people by title and organization that you would like to meet and why you need to meet them. On a third list, identify people already in your network that you should introduce to another of your contacts. As you build your lists over time, move people around, create new ones, and merge as your priorities change.

With all of the names and titles on your various lists, start your own Personal Networking Roadmap for two of the people. Ask yourself questions like “whom do I know that can introduce me to Person A?” and “where do people with a title like xyz socialize?” Use your roadmap to find and locate these individuals employing the six degrees of separation concept originally developed by Stanley Milgram in 1969. Milgram concluded in his study, “The Drawing Power of Crowds of Different Size,” that “only 5.5 intermediaries will, on the average, suffice to link randomly

chosen individuals, no matter where each lives in the United States.”

In the metropolitan area that you work, play, and live, you can absolutely network yourself to anyone using the Milgram concept. It begins with you. You create your own success momentum.

## 2 ARRIVE EARLY AND STAY LATE

To make the most out of each professional event, it is essential to arrive early and stay late. Generally, there are three types of personalities when it comes to arrival time. For a variety of personal and work-related reasons, people tend to be what we have termed, “earlies,” “middles,” or “lates.”

To illustrate the personalities, let's have an event start at 7:00 pm and end at 9:00 pm. Earlies arrive between 6:45 and 7:15 and tend to leave around 8:15 to 8:30. Middles likely arrive between 7:30 and 8:00 and tend to leave around 9:00. Lates usually arrive after 8:00 and tend to stay beyond the announced event ending time leaving between 9:30 and 10:00. Arriving early and staying late, then, affords you the best opportunities to connect with everyone at the event.

## LEAVE A FIRST IMPRESSION THAT LASTS



Okay, so you have arrived at the event early. You are looking to connect with people from your personal networking roadmap. As the saying goes, “you only have one chance

to make a first impression.” At an event, you should ideally be meeting a new person every seven to 10 minutes. Since you only have a few minutes to make a first and lasting impression, you need to make the most of your time.

To do this, think about your business story ahead of time. When someone asks “what do you do?” are

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**A** friend wants to fix you up on a blind date. Would you go on the date without first learning a few things about your potential suitor? Of course not. What questions would you ask? What does your future date like to do or eat? His/her favorite foods, movies, music? To get a sense of whether the blind date might be a good match, you would want to do as much homework as possible, right?

At a professional event, your priority is to get as many bona fide business dates as possible. During a typical social setting, you have



you offering a compelling answer? Are people asking you genuine interest questions? Are they making introductions and referrals because you established a strong initial impression? Are they asking you out on a business date?

Your answer to “What do you do?” is a high-level, executive summary of your core business story. It should take you 30 seconds or less to say at a normal conversational pace. Take time to organize and practice your answer to what is often referred to as your “elevator speech.” This way, you will be prepared with a focused and genuine short story—one that will draw people in, as well as draw potential business in, to you.

#### 4 COMMUNICATE POSITIVE BODY LANGUAGE

Albert Mehrabian in 1971 published *Silent Messages*. His breakthrough work on body language more than 35 years ago is still widely quoted. Mehrabian concluded that in live, person-to-person communication, facial expression was the key to being liked. His analysis showed that likeability consisted of “7% verbal liking, 38% vocal liking, and 55% facial liking.”

Intuitively this makes lots of sense. Body language speaks volumes about you. Maintain great eye contact, smile a lot, and give a professional handshake.

It’s not who you know, it’s who knows you! As such, when you are ending a conversation, pay special attention to your body language. End the conversation as warmly as you started it, regardless if you make a great connection. Make the other person feel good about your interaction, which leads us to the next suggestion.

#### 5 MAKE EVERYONE FEEL SPECIAL

I know that so many people have trouble starting a conversation. They are not sure how to break the ice and to make it seem natural. Plus, many people do not practice transitions to get you from small talk to business talk.

Achieve genuine connections with authentic conversation. Most conversations start with something like, “Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. What do you do?” “What do you do?” has become the default opening. It forces the dialogue to be typical, impersonal business talk.

Help build stronger and more profitable business relationships by using authentic, in-the-moment comments. The key is “share and ask.” Share something about yourself and then ask a related question. Start off with light, in-the-moment remarks and questions. Here are a few questions that will help break the ice: (a) Nice \_\_\_\_\_ (tie, suit, shirt). Where did you get it? (b) I heard about this event from \_\_\_\_\_ (my friend, the newspaper, from an email). How about you? and (c) I was reading the \_\_\_\_\_ (insert known periodical) and came across an interesting article about \_\_\_\_\_. Did you catch it?

Take a few minutes to get to know someone on a personal level. As humans, we crave connection. So do not rush the conversation into the business realm. When you feel comfortable, and it is generally intuitive, start to weave in business-related questions.

My absolute favorite quote has been attributed to Maya Angelou, “People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

#### 6 THINK AND ACT LIKE AN EXPERT NETWORKER

Imagine you are at a professional event. You are observing the room from a distance. You notice that one of the men is dressed more casually than the others and he is standing by himself. You continue to scan the room and notice several groups of people clumped together—a group of women in their mid thirties, a group of men in their fifties, and a group of good friends laughing loudly. These are just a few examples of where human behavior drives our interactions: As the saying goes, “birds of a feather flock together.”

Despite the fact that I often hear phrases like, “you are right, I should not talk to my friends” and “of course, I should not sit next to my office colleagues,” the power of “comfort” ensures that we seek out people we already know or those most like ourselves. Leaving our “comfort zones” at professional events gives us the best opportunity to develop a diversified network and to become an expert networker.

An expert networker (a) takes specific and deliberate actions to meet the individuals identified on his or her personal networking roadmap, (b) keeps conversations with known friends and colleagues to a simple greeting, (c) spends 7 to 10 minutes talking with people, (d) sits next to strangers at a lunch meeting, (e) makes a great first and lasting impression; and (f) ensures that each person feels special and appreciated. **MAR**

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