

Trio of networking tips

It's more than small talk that helps you connect; be genuine

During my initial career as an equity derivatives trader, networking was completely unnecessary.

Fast forward 10 years, and I now co-run a shopping center investment company. I pretty much failed at my first networking event for investors.

So, I did my research and I learned what it takes. It's not that hard, and can be divided into three helpful categories of achieving success in networking: social media, social events and meaningful introductions.

Social media

LinkedIn has become the pre-eminent social media platform for business. In my experience, it has two extremely important uses for networking: 1. Recruiting talent. 2. Researching people's photos and bios either before or after meeting people at formal introductions and social events. This is an essential and indispensable step in preplanning networking events and in the follow-up afterward.

Social events

First, you must go into social events with an authentic desire to meet new people and a willingness to be vulnerable. If you go in with a purpose to meet only "important people" with an expectation that a conversation will result in some concrete business outcome, you may be disappointed. No one wants to talk to that superficial person at the party. Second, study the body language and positioning of people in a room. Target the person who is standing alone with his or her drink looking mildly uncomfortable.

The second target would be the group that is talking, but not too closely together, thereby indicating that they are not in an intense conversation. If you walk into the group and introduce yourself, either the group will continue their earlier conversation, or your entrance will cause a break in the topic.

If your entrance causes a break, you will need the five questions that I learned from Vistage speaker, Boaz Rauchwerger: 1. "Where are you from originally?" 2. "What brought you here?" 3. "Do you have a family?" 4. "What do you do?" 5. "What did you want to be when you were growing up?"

If you find out that the person you are talking to is the wife who accompanied her husband to his work conference, don't cut the conversation short and look for your next target. It's rude and inauthentic. One of my best business contacts came from meeting the wife of a senior executive of an important company in my industry.

Meaningful introductions

Often there will be specific people you want in your network, but there won't be an "event" at which to meet them. In this case, you need to find out if you have any in common in your current network (I use LinkedIn for this).

If you do have someone in common, you need to ask for a "meaningful introduction." Most people will do this for you as long as you are doing it for them as well.

Learning how to network and embracing it has been life-changing for me. I love learning the uniqueness of everyone I meet. It's been great for business, but mostly it's been a lot of fun. ●



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