



The 9 essentials of
networking with people
and creating more opportunity

the business guide on professional networking

a publication of MaxPitch Media, Inc.

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Richmond, Virginia
www.bguides.com

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Go to work.

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networking **essentials**

- 1 create a plan
- 2 prepare
- 3 get involved
- 4 practice good communication skills
- 5 participate
- 6 build relationships
- 7 ask for what you want
- 8 organize your network
- 9 have fun

the 9 essentials of networking with people and creating more opportunity

Networking is about making contact – contact with people.

A fundamental business skill well worth developing, networking can open the door to incredible opportunities for you and your organization (predictable and unexpected) and help further strengthen current relationships (internal and external).

Companies are made up of people. And people enjoy working with individuals they know and trust. Those business professionals who understand building **a successful network of solid connections is a reciprocal process** will realize the most success.

Networking is simply building relationships. Enter every relationship with the understanding that each of you represents a valuable resource with expertise to share. The more you bring to the relationship, the more you will take away – in knowledge, in good will, and in business success.

Take action now to build a network that will benefit your organization, and you, with every conversation -- with every contact. Be deliberate about it.

You are the most powerful tool for business success. Make contact.

1

create a plan

Think about what you want to accomplish by networking. Review your organization's business strategy. Determine specifically what you and your team can contribute to the organization's vision. What you want to accomplish determines where and with whom you'll network. Consider...

1. what **types of people** are valuable to you and your organization?
2. what **groups or events** offer the opportunity to meet these people?

Brainstorm (on your own or with co-workers) to answer both of these key planning questions. Then set a specific goal for yourself, or for your team, for the number of networking events you'll attend each month or quarter and the number of people you'll meet at each.

Types of **people** might include:

industry peers, typical primary and secondary buyers of your product or service, third-party influencers (people who influence others to buy something by recommendation), suppliers, those who sell something purchased before your offering is considered

Types of **events** or **groups** might include:

industry conferences and tradeshows, professional societies, civic groups, local chambers of commerce, networking groups

To find appropriate venues that might work for your objectives, conduct a search on the Internet, as well as in your local newspaper and trade publications.

We don't accomplish anything
in this world alone...

Sandra Day O'Connor
U.S. Supreme Court Justice
(1930 -)

2

prepare

When you and your team make the commitment to network, you must **be ready to take advantage of every opportunity to make a connection**. Preparation is the key to maximizing your chances for enjoyable and valuable interactions. Consider the steps of a typical networking interaction...

1. **approach** (exchange brief personal introductions)
2. **engage** (ask general questions to initiate conversation)
3. **learn & inform** (ask open-ended questions about the person or person's business and share key facts about yourself and your organization)
4. **exit** (end a conversation graciously with or without a request for follow-up)

You can easily prepare for each of these steps by creating and practicing the delivery of some very basic statements and questions. See the appendix for samples for each step, decide what works for you, and then practice delivering your statements and questions with your team or a colleague on a regular basis (especially a week or so prior to an event).

3 get involved

You'll network everywhere, but you can focus your efforts – and develop your skills – at designated networking events hosted by professional and civic or community groups. You'll find a varied membership and a different experience in each group, so diversify your network with participation in more than one club, as your schedule permits.

As a member of any group, **put yourself in a position that requires you to meet new people** rather than settle into a familiar group. This is very important to expanding your network. Volunteer for the membership committee or serve as an ambassador at group events. You'll meet new members, and you may learn more about current members as you make introductions and initiate conversations. Consider bringing along a different co-worker to introduce at each event. People will feel they know more about your organization when they know several employees.

4 practice good communication skills

Effective communication is an invaluable skill for successful networking. To get the most from your efforts, be sure to...

appear approachable and pleasant

- smile
- make eye contact
- project energy and a positive attitude
- address people by name
- wear a readable name tag placed where people can easily see it

proactively initiate discussions

- ask a general question you have prepared and practiced

speak clearly

- minimize eating during networking time
- speak concisely and illustrate your thoughts with interesting examples or stories
- adjust your voice level appropriately to compensate for room noise

ask relevant and open-ended questions

- use your prepared and practiced questions, as appropriate
- ask for opinions and reply with pertinent comments

listen with complete attention

- focus on what's being said rather than how you will respond or illustrate your knowledge
- avoid allowing your eyes to wander from the person with whom you're engaged
- acknowledge key points with a nod or smile
- avoid appearing rushed
- acknowledge and respond to cell phones and pagers when you're no longer engaged in a discussion

5

participate

Attend each networking event with a specific goal in mind to drive your participation. Decide that you'll meet five new people or plan to introduce three people to someone new, or both. Be careful to set your goals to a level that keeps you focused on **making quality contacts** rather than rushed contacts.

Acting like the host at any event is one good way to keep you on the move. As the host, you would introduce yourself to people you didn't know. You would connect people who could benefit from an introduction. You would ensure no one stood alone at the edge of the action. Do the same at every event you attend. People will appreciate your interest and you'll foster positive relationships for yourself and others.

6

build relationships

Successful networking goes beyond events and first contacts. Developing a strong network involves building relationships with people you can help and people who can help you.

Appropriate follow-up actions to a meeting or event are an obvious way to begin building relationships. Also, periodically help your contacts with no expectation of returned assistance. Seek out ways to provide value. Help them make connections, send them a potential customer, forward a book or recent

article that might interest them, take them to a meeting, or bring someone to lunch. Take an interest in their lives and their success.

When someone makes an effort to help you, follow up with a timely thank you note, regardless of the immediate outcome.

Be genuine. Be prompt. Follow through on your commitments.

We cannot live for ourselves alone.
Our lives are connected by a thousand
invisible threads... our actions run
as causes and return to us as results.

Herman Melville
American novelist
(1819 -1891)

7 ask for what you want

People often ask, 'How can I help?' or offer assistance with 'Let me know what I can do.' Respond by **telling them exactly what action is most helpful** to your organization. Ask for an introduction to the long-time friend who owns the company your CEO wants as a client. Provide a stack of marketing brochures for distribution (with a personal referral) at the next industry event. Most people are flattered that you would seek them out for help and enjoy the opportunity to support their colleagues and new contacts.

In a timely fashion, follow up with a sincere expression of thanks and an update on the results.

8 organize your network

Get the most from your network by creating a system to organize all contacts and track interaction with them. Whether you do it on paper or in a database, **create a file for each person** in your network. Include contact information, personal interests, favored charities, unique facts, connections created by the relationship, and a record of calls, meetings and correspondence.

You may find it helpful to categorize contacts for easier reference. Decide what categories work best for your purposes. If the network is national, then geographic regions could work well. If it's spread across a wide range of professions, then filing by industry may prove most useful. Select an effective method and use it consistently. And, be sure an inability to create "the perfect system" doesn't keep you from having any system at all.

Update the files regularly – after each interaction and as you receive new information.

If you have knowledge,
let others light their candles at it.

Margaret Fuller
American author
(1810-1850)

9 have fun

Relax and enjoy yourself. Networking gives you the chance to meet new people, often from diverse backgrounds, and learn something new. It's good for business, and it can be good for you personally.

If you relax and **enjoy the conversations** with people you meet, then you'll project a friendly expression and a positive attitude. People will want to spend time with you and get to know you. Plus, a relaxed conversation can go places a forced conversation never would, which can reveal opportunities and resources far beyond what you expect.

networking preparation: sample statements and questions

approach

- Hi, FIRST NAME. I'm FIRST AND LASTNAME with XYZ COMPANY, a local PRODUCT/ SERVICE business.

engage

- How long have you been [a member of, involved with] [GROUP NAME]?
- What brought you out here [today, tonight]?
- Have you been to a [MEETING TYPE] before?
- What do you think of the [show, meeting, event] so far?
- What did you think of the last [show, meeting, event]?
- What do you think about [SPECIFIC EVENT OCCURANCE OR EVENT]?
- How do you know [SPEAKER NAME, ORGANIZER OF THE EVENT, SPONSORING GROUP OF THE EVENT]?

learn & inform

To learn, use open-ended questions list and practice active listening.

To inform, create several well-thought out statements that specifically and clearly address...

- what you do
- what your company does for its customers
- how your customers benefit from what you and your company do

exit

for follow-up

- Can I give you a call [later in the week, next week] to set up a time to talk in more detail?
- Would you like to get together [DAY, WEEK] and work through the idea?

for graceful exit with no follow-up

- Good meeting you. Will I see you at [OTHER MEETING NAME]?
- That sounds exciting. Best of luck with it. I'll let you get back to [PRIOR ACTIVITY OF ATTENDEE]. Enjoyed meeting you.
- It's quite and event. We should probably keep moving if we're going to see all the exhibits. I enjoyed talking with you, FIRST NAME.

the open-ended questions for networking & business conversation

personal

How did you get involved in... ?
Who helped you get involved in...?
What were you doing previously?
With what company did you work previously?
What [did, do] you enjoy most about that?
What is the best thing you learned from that?
Where have you learned the most about...?
Who taught you the most about...?
What did you take away from the experience?
How has that impacted you?
What [was, is] the biggest challenge with that?
What advice would you give someone else about that?
What are your thoughts on...?

business

How did your company get involved in...?
What kind of challenges are you and your company facing?
What's the most important priority to you and your company right now?
How have you been handling that?
How is that working out?
What effect has that had on you and your company?
How did you overcome that?
How does that process work now?
What challenges does that process create?
What are the best things about that process?
What does everyone else at your company think about that?
With whom have you had the most success in the past?
What innovative [products, services] has your company introduced over the last couple years?

general

What does that mean?
How do you mean?
How do you see that working?
What concerns do you have about...?
What other events have you found helpful to attend?