

Top 10 Business Networking Tips

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1. **Make networking a part of your written strategic marketing plan.** Decide on your business focus. Determine your target market and where/how you can reach them or people who know them. Decide logically what organizations to join and what conferences to attend so you carry out your relationship-building activities in a planned fashion.
2. **Work an event, not just a room.** Just as the Chicago Bulls didn't win six championships just by how they "worked the floor," you also won't get the full benefits of networking unless you do your homework behind the scenes. Develop a winning attitude (this is worthwhile event for me to attend!) and continue to hone your communication skills so you can execute when you get to the "room." A master networker is a master communicator.
3. **Make a professional first impression through your appearance and demeanor.** People decide 10 things about you within 10 seconds of meeting you. Decide what impression you want to make and then how to make it through the colors and styles you wear, your posture, handshakes, gestures, eye contact and facial expressions.
4. **Create a 10-15 second verbal business card (VBC) filled with benefits of doing business with you.** It should inform others about what's in it for them and entice them to want to talk with you more. Save the "who you are" and "how you do it" for later in the conversation. Your VBC is the entrée to your elevator pitch.
5. **Adapt your verbal business card to a short e-mail signature to continue to establish your brand.** Conduct your own ongoing public relations campaign by continually reinforcing your marketing strategies.
6. **Start conversations with open-ended questions.** This helps to avoid the "Yes" and "No" scenario that soon leads to silence between two people ... and maybe even perspiration! Ask questions that will carry the conversation and provide information to you simultaneously.
7. **Have your ask-for questions and listen-for answers at the tip-of-your tongue.** These two techniques will help you more quickly qualify people you are talking with and people they know. They will help you determine if you want to set up future interactions. You are the expert on what to ask and what you want to hear since you have qualified your target market.
8. **Know how to end a conversation.** Since networking is planting seeds, not sales (which is harvesting), keep your interactions to about 10 minutes per person. That's ample time to make a positive impression and decide if the person is someone with whom you would like to build a relationship. It's okay to plan endings just as you plan openers.

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9. **Follow up.** Whether it is to acknowledge your initial encounter, set up a meeting or share an article or a contact you promised, do it! You will stand out from the pack. Choose the vehicle (e-mail, telephone, handwritten note) that you know best fits the other person's style.
10. **Give before you plan to get, and don't keep track.** Banks don't allow you to withdraw money (without interest!) before you make a deposit. Neither does the universe. When you understand and live by this premise, you will truly benefit from the networking process. You will achieve top-of-the mind positioning and build a network that works for you!

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Lillian D. Bjorseth has been called a networking expert by the *Chicago Tribune* and the business networking authority by the Association Forum of Chicagoland. She's a people-skills speaker, trainer, skills coach and author of *Breakthrough Networking: Building Relationships That Last*, *52 Ways to Break the Ice & Target Your Market* and the *Nothing Happens Until We Communicate* CD/workbook series. Her Fortune 100 experience includes more than 10 years at AT&T where she trained top executives in media and communication skills. Contact her at lillianspeaks@duoforce.com, www.duoforce.com, or 630-983-5308.

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