

## Holiday Networking Etiquette by Lillian D. Bjorseth, President Duoforce Enterprises, Inc.

Office parties. Neighborhood open houses. Country club dances. Festive chamber of commerce after hours. Professional organizational luncheons and dinners. From Thanksgiving through Jan. 1, these events have a much more social than business air, even though your membership may be business-based. So is it okay to network, and, if so, how much?

The answer is a definite “yes” and, in most cases, “differently and in moderation” also apply.

- **Be subtler.** Start conversations with small talk about the holidays, the surroundings, the weather, etc., rather than with “What do you do?” Be ready to reciprocate with similar topics. Have your Verbal Business Card in your back pocket just in case you need it.
- **Look and act professional.** People still decide 10 things about you within 10 seconds of seeing you and will carry that impression with them into the boardroom or onto the telephone. Specifics include:
  - **Don’t overeat or over drink.** Moderation is the key, and you know your limits. Don’t overfill your “little” plate. Snacking ahead of time can curb your appetite at the event. Keep cold drinks out of your right hand. Ice and condensation will likely make it feel cold and moist. Using your left hand is a far better solution than wrapping a napkin around the glass. If seating is available, sit down for a few minutes to eat. When you rise again, your hands will be free. And, don’t forget to wash them before you start shaking again!
  - **Don’t tell off-color jokes or use crude language just because the atmosphere is more relaxed.** Such behavior offends most people, including coworkers, their spouses, partners and families who can carry a lot of weight.
  - **Dress properly for the occasion.** Find out ahead of time the appropriate dress for men and women. And, women, don’t show excessive cleavage if you want to be taken seriously in the office or to use the event to lay the groundwork for future employment.
  - **Remember the behavioral basics.** Exhibit good posture. Shake hands firmly. Maintain eye contact at least 85 percent of the time. Keep your gestures understated, especially in a crowded room where expansive gestures can lead to touching someone else or even spilling your food or drink ... or theirs!
- **Don’t target only the head honcho.** Whether it is the company president or the organization chair, don’t think your evening is incomplete if you don’t spend the token two minutes with them. Have longer and more meaningful conversation with those who are lower on the totem pole and aren’t besieged by everyone else. Top brass seldom gets involved in the day-to-day hiring,

Lillian D. Bjorseth  
2221 Ridgewood Rd.  
Lisle, IL 60532

630-983-5308  
630-983-5312 (fax)

[www.duoforce.com](http://www.duoforce.com)  
[lillian@duoforce.com](mailto:lillian@duoforce.com)

promotions and other managerial duties. Make a positive impression on everyone you meet so you will be memorable long after the event is over.

- **Listen more than you talk.** Use your two ears and one mouth as a proportional guide. Ask questions and give others time to answer in their own style, from rapid fire to slowly. Never interrupt or finish their sentences. Store the information to process later. Avoid long one-on-one conversations, especially during a meal when you also have people on your right and left. When business does come up, keep the discussion general rather than zeroing in on your job specifics. Networking is planting seeds, sales is harvesting. This is *not* the place to sell.
- **Carry your business cards.** Women, keep at least a small supply in your holiday bag. If attending with a male partner, have him keep some extras in his inside suit pocket. It's so much more professional than writing your vital information on a cocktail napkin.
- **Don't press people on the spot.** If you want more information, a referral or an appointment, get a business card and permission to e-mail or call later. Then follow up during normal business hours.
- **Don't be the last to leave.** Unless you are close friends with the hosts, don't be the last to leave the neighborhood open house. Similarly, unless you have volunteered for clean-up duty, don't be the straggler at company or organizational functions. It's like pushing back from the table when you are still hungry: leave while you're still making a positive impression.
- **Send holiday cards.** Bypass the pre-printed, sterile ones. Take the time to sign your name and write a short personal note. As appropriate, send to clients, prospective employers and, particularly, to those people at any level who are vital links in your networking chain.

© 2006 Duoforce Enterprises, Inc. Lisle IL

**The *Chicago Tribune* calls Lillian D. Bjorseth a networking expert. The Association Forum of Chicagoland dubs her a business networking authority. Since leaving AT&T in 1990 after a successful career in public relations, Lillian has helped tens of thousands of people built high-value relationships by improving business development, business networking and communication skills. She's a speaker, trainer, skills coach and author, whose published works include *Breakthrough Networking: Building Relationships That Last*. 630-983-5308, [www.duoforce.com](http://www.duoforce.com), [lillianspeaks@duoforce.com](mailto:lillianspeaks@duoforce.com).**

**Lillian D. Bjorseth**  
2221 Ridgewood Rd.  
Lisle, IL 60532

630-983-5308  
630-983-5312 (fax)

[www.duoforce.com](http://www.duoforce.com)  
[lillian@duoforce.com](mailto:lillian@duoforce.com)