

Feature Article: Work an Event, not Just a Room – Networking Tips

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Networking is among the top reasons many people join PCMA. When they don't get the results they anticipate, they "blame" the group for not delivering on its promises. It's up to PCMA to provide creative and multiple venues for connections to occur. It's up to the members, however, to make the connections by networking strategically rather than just networking. Working an event entails knowing what to do beforehand, how to work it once you get there and what to do afterwards. It involves much more than just schmoozing with people.

What to do Before the Event

1. Create a Plan.

An element that is key to all your relationship building is to make a plan! Word-of-mouth is the most successful marketing tool, which means networking needs to be part of your written marketing plan. It becomes your first step in choosing what to attend. Answer questions like:

- What is the focus of your business or career? (What do you do? How do you do it differently? How do people benefit from what you do?)
- Who is your target market?
- Where can you meet them? (What organizations/clubs do they join? What conferences/trade shows do they attend?)

2. Become a Student of Impression Management.

Know what impression you want to create and how to create it. People decide 10 things about you within 10 seconds of seeing you. It is based on your image, a combination of your appearance and behavior. Every color you wear sends a message. Decide what you want it to be. Do you want to project authority, responsibility and knowledge? Then, wear navy blue. Do you want to project success? Then wear darker gray. If you want to appear dependable, practical, stable – wear brown. For intuitive, regal, spiritual – purple. Powerful, dignified, sophisticated – is best represented by black.

Is the event business casual or business attire? Whatever the answer, remember that a suit jacket with long sleeves, slightly padded shoulders and a collar makes you look one-third more powerful. Body language is another key element that speaks before you say anything. Your posture can bespeak confidence or the lack thereof. Learn the meaning of the six standard handshakes, and how to react to them. Eye contact needs to be steady without being too piercing or too weak. A good rule of thumb is to maintain it at least 85 percent of the time. You can look down or away in thought; however, you need to return to the subject relatively quickly before you appear to be uninterested.

3. Prepare a Powerful Verbal Business Card.

You want your all-important introductory words to intrigue people while at the same time inform them about what you do. They must be laden with benefits. People are interested in how what you do may affect or help them.

Your verbal business card is the front end of your elevator pitch. It's only a sentence or two. That's as long as you have to grab someone's attention. It is also the length of time that is proper for you to speak before giving someone else a chance. Make sure to include active verbs, the most powerful words in the English language. For example:

- I am Lillian Bjorseth, and I help entrepreneurs through Fortune 500 employees build high-value business relationships.

Notice I did not say I am a speaker, trainer, author, etc. Those words generally cause people to think, "So what." Make yours elicit the question, "how?" That's when you can launch into all the things you are itching to say.

4. Know your Relationship-building Strengths and Limitations.

Use a behavioral tool such as DISC to analyze yourself in the networking arena. Even more important, learn to read others so you can network in their style and quickly help them feel comfortable. If you are naturally confident like the dauntless style and have a powerful stance, handshake and eye contact, ease up a little, lest you overwhelm others. Indefatigables, curb your natural enthusiasm and desire to do almost all the talking. You'll benefit from listening more.

Supportive networkers should push their comfort level, and talk with three or four people, rather than just the one who makes them feel safe. And, for those of you with a careful style, be less stoic and react more. People may think you are aloof, don't care and don't want to be bothered with small talk, and therefore, relationship building in general.

What to do at the Event

Even people who understand the value of networking may have trouble getting over the first hurdle: walking into a room and feeling as if they fit. Some feel this way every time a conversation ends, and they need to start the process anew.

Arrive early. This allows you to meet key people. Be respectful of their time, as they often have much to do at the last minute. Shake hands, make a good impression and move on. Arriving early also gives you an opportunity to choose the right seat, get the best exposure for your materials, meet others in a less frenzied atmosphere, relax and adjust in the moment ... and eat. Since it is impolite to speak while eating and you want your hands free, don't walk around with a plate in one hand and a beverage in the other. Especially risky is to hold a cold beverage in your right hand and then transfer it to the left to shake someone's hand. Brrrr! Think of attendees as guests in your home. Act like a host and approach people rather than waiting to be approached. You'll never again complain that no one talked with you.

My 10-minute rule for working a room breaks down into an introduction, body and conclusion. The introduction is for small talk and possible business card exchange. Remember business card etiquette: if you want someone to have your card, ask them for theirs first. If they do not ask you in return, why give them one? Their silence has spoken loudly!

The goal of the body is to find a commonality. Have your "ask-for" questions prepared so that you can determine quickly if you wish to pursue building a relationship. Equally important are your "listen-for" answers, again, so you can determine if you wish to move to another level.

The conclusion ends the interaction, and for some it is as hard as starting a conversation. Plan endings just as you plan initial words. This helps you politely end one encounter and move on to the next. The person you are speaking with is probably eager to move on, too.

Good times to end a conversation include when:

- About 10 minutes have elapsed (you'll get a feel for this)
- The other person's eyes noticeably begin wandering
- Others shift their stance away from you
- Someone glances at his/her watch
- Feedback is "interesting," "hmm," "really," in a monotone

Say good-bye to everyone you met. Keep it short, upbeat and positive, and always use the person's first name.

What to do After the Event

You will immediately stand out if you do what you promised. This is what separates those with integrity from those who merely say they will do something.

While there are myriad ways to store your information and follow-up methods, what is most important is that you choose the one(s) that fit the other person's preferences and behavioral style. You need to know if it's e-mail, a letter, the telephone or lunch. Know whether to talk about the weather or get right to business. Gauge the right amount of time to wait between contacts and how often to pursue others.

People like to be treated in their style, not yours, and as the sales person (and we all sell all day long!), it is up to you to adapt to each situation. Happy networking!

Click here www.duooforce.com to read more about the woman the Association Forum of Chicagoand calls the business networking authority.