

Develop a Game Plan for Networking at Events

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<http://www.howhardareyouknocking.com/author.asp>

- Plan, plan, plan. If you are attending a large event, make sure you develop a game plan to cover all the ground successfully and efficiently. Think about what types of professionals you want to meet. Have specific questions prepared so you can be comfortable starting a conversation. If you are new to town, ask about referrals to community organizations. If you just graduated, find someone who graduated a few years ahead of you and ask about their professional progress. If you are in transition, look to meet business owners or recruiters who can help you in your job hunt. If you are a freelancer, keep your eye out for entrepreneurs and small business owners who could use your services.
- Since networking is a reciprocal relationship with an implied value exchange, be prepared to offer something of value to each person you meet. Make sure you focus on the conversation and the people you are meeting, not just the fact that you are looking for a job. Try to understand your contact's needs so you can understand how you can be of value. Develop a list of intelligent questions: What type of projects are you currently working on? Is there any need for help with this specific project? Are you looking to hire people with any specific skills? Even if you can't offer something of value at that moment follow up with a contact or idea at a later time.
- Measure your networking success by the number of meaningful conversations you've had, not how many business cards you collect!
- Be conscious of nonverbal behavior. If someone is looking at a watch or looking around the room, use that time to say, “I do not want to take too much of your time. Could I get your business card and maybe we can finish our discussion after the event.”
- When exchanging business cards try this technique. First, read the person's name out loud. People always like hearing their own name, and it shows that you have interest and appreciate their card. Then, once they leave, turn the card over and write specific characteristics about the meeting or conversation on the back of the card. You should document appearance, such as “blond hair, tall, black coat” to help refresh your memory. Note details and facts about the conversation. For instance, “Talked about the Cleveland Indians” and “Found out that they will be converting their systems and need a project manager.” The point of this exercise is to provide relevant data that will help you to remember the person three months from now.
- Final thought on networking. Be yourself and take an honest interest in others. Be a good listener to the concerns of your network. Help them solve their problems or meet other contacts so that they want to help you when the time comes. Networking is a reciprocal relationship. The more you care about others, the more you will succeed.