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Be the Most  
Persuasive Person  
in the Room

## Are You NetWORKING or Just Doing NetWORK?

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Maybe it's the first time you're standing in the doorway to a room of people you don't know. You're swallowing hard because there's no saliva in your mouth. That's because all of the moisture in your body has moved to your sweaty palms, which are clutching your increasingly damp business cards.

Or maybe you've been in that doorway many times — but chances are good that you're still exhibiting a milder form of both symptoms.

They don't call it "NetWORKING" for nothing! Here are some ideas to help you get the most from this opportunity — so it's not just another duty.

### **Trick #1: Practice Your Elevator Pitch.**

This doesn't mean memorize it and say it the same way every time someone asks, so it sounds rote. You just need to feel comfortable responding to "Tell me about what you do." so you won't be embarrassed by stumbling through your response and can have a good start to your conversations.

### **Trick #2: Walk In with a Goal.**

It probably shouldn't be one of these: 1) give/get a large number of business cards, 2) find a new client, or 3) close a sale. This is tough. Most of the time we (force ourselves to) network because we have a business need and we want to create an opportunity.

Set a realistic goal. If you're a new networker or shy, that could be speaking with at least two new people (rather than finding one person and attaching yourself to him or her all night). If you're a regular networker, your goal could be to locate someone you'd like to add to your "life team"— people you can cultivate and count on for good advice and support over the long term.

Make sure this goal is measurable: quantitatively and qualitatively. Also, state it to yourself in positive language. For example: "I have at least three (quantity) meaningful conversations (quality) and identify one person (quantity) that I want to meet again."

It's that law of attraction: going in knowing what you want increases the chances you'll get it. Then say it to yourself before you plunge into the room, at that moment when you may be the most nervous.

**Tip #3: Be Unselfish.**

One philosophy often associated with networking (courtesy of Business Networking International) is "givers gain." Go into a room ready to make connections to help the people you meet. This means you have to listen. It also requires you to ask non-directional questions: letting the person talk about *what he or she wants* — rather than what you want.

This actually can lead to a deeper level of conversation, where you can learn about issues he or she faces. And if you can connect this person to someone else who can help — or provide the help yourself — you've done a service that will be remembered.

**Trick #4: Be Selfish.**

Here's a person you will find at every networking event. He only wishes to speak about himself, his business, his activities. He hands you his card before he even asks your name. If he takes your card, you may find he left it on the table after departing — or enrolled you in his e-newsletter the next day without asking your permission.

When faced with him, remember your goal for this event. If listening to and assisting him will help reach your goal, then stay in the conversation. If it won't (which usually is the case), then find a polite way to disengage ("Thanks for telling me about what you do. I'm sure there are other people you want to meet, too, and I hope you enjoy the rest of your evening."). Then shake hands and move on. Trick #3's being unselfish doesn't mean being a doormat.

**Trick #5: Follow Up.**

This is where most networkers fail. You get back to a busy office and can forget that promise to make an introduction or a follow-up call. Three tactics can help:

- **Only ask for a card from a person with whom you intend to follow up.** That way, you won't walk out of an event with a bunch of cards and have to pick through them later to find the people you need to contact.
- **Write important information about the person on the back of his or her card.** It's considered polite to first ask the person if this is fine. Few people will object: they usually are flattered that you care enough to take notes. Write a few salient points they made and any next steps you promised.

- **Follow up within 24 hours.** This could be as simple as a quick email about how you enjoyed meeting them, to a phone call (feel free to leave a voicemail either before or after hours if you don't really need to speak), to making the connection you mentioned, to sending a card or letter (snail mail actually stands out these days). People will be flattered that you remembered them and impressed that you are a person of your word. And if they promised to make a connection for you, this will likely help them get to it sooner.

Your best networking experiences happen when you have meaningful conversations on subjects people care about. And when you find ways to help others get to their goals, they'll want to do the same for you. Then it becomes "Networking."