

19 Ways To 'Kill It' at Your Next Networking Event

Entrepreneur.com
MARCH 20, 2015

JOHN RAMPTON

Entrepreneur and Connector

Networking events: Love 'em or hate 'em, they're a necessary part of life as a business professional. They let you meet like-minded individuals and make important business connections; they may even net you a much-needed job or contract.

Despite the potential benefits of networking, few of us plan ahead and think about how to make the most of the opportunity. But there are at least 19 strategies that successful networkers can use to connect and impress at business events.

1. Research key attendees before the event.

If there are individuals you're hoping to meet (and impress) at your next event, do some pre-meeting research online. Scope out these individuals' LinkedIn profiles to learn the basics about them and look for common connections.

2. Discuss commonalities.

People tend to gravitate toward those with whom they share similarities. This is known as the similarity attraction effect. When meeting others with shared traits or experiences, be sure to point out the similarities you have to increase perceived social compatibility.

3. Ask questions (lots of them).

Too often I encounter people who are interested only in talking about themselves. Instead of wasting golden opportunities by blabbing about yourself, ask thoughtful questions -- and actually listen to the answers.

4. Be a connector.

Instead of focusing only on making your own connections, make an effort to connect others. When speaking with someone, think about whether there's someone else at the event who could help (or be helped) by this person, and then make an introduction. In my own work life all I do is connect. Be a connector, yourself.

5. Have a purpose.

People use networking events for a myriad of reasons, including finding a job, meeting potential clients or just socializing. Expert networker [Murray Newlands](#) suggests, "Before you arrive at an event, ask yourself what you're hoping to achieve and what you need to do to achieve it."

6. Don't be a product-pusher.

Nobody likes that guy or gal who attends events to push products on to people. Networking events may result in leads, but should never be used as a way to directly sell or promote your products.

7. Keep an open posture.

An "open" posture -- head up, arms and legs uncrossed -- conveys an openness to being approached. Looking at the floor or crossing your arms, on the other hand, can convey shyness, unfriendliness or even hostility.

8. Introduce yourself.

Networking events can be awkward. Particularly if you're an introvert, starting conversations may not come naturally. Vow to overcome your natural temptation to blend into the woodwork, and make a point of introducing yourself to at least five people.

9. Focus on how people feel when they're with you.

Brian Honigman suggests that, "Instead of focusing on how you feel at the event, focus on making your conversation partner feel good about themselves. You can do this through being a great listener, asking thoughtful questions and giving your undivided attention. After the event, people are more likely to remember those individuals who made them feel good about themselves."

10. Do not, under any circumstances, ditch a conversation partner for someone more "important."

I understand the temptation to weasel your way out of a dead-end conversation in order to talk with that CEO who just walked into the room. And while there's nothing wrong with subtly steering a conversation to a close, abruptly ending it to speak with someone "better" is a definite networking faux pas.

11. Be a listener.

"When in doubt, listen," suggests Steve Olenski. "Ask questions, and then listen to the answers. Ask a person's name, and then actually listen to it and make a mental note to remember it. Most people at these events are talkers, so being a thoughtful listener can set you apart from the pack."

12. Take notes.

Immediately following an event (please, not during!), jot down helpful information you gleaned. These details will quickly fade in the days following an event, so taking physical notes can help.

13. Give your full attention.

It's tempting to continue scanning the room while you talk with someone, but this is a great way to make that person feel 2 inches tall. When you're with someone, give him or her your undivided attention, just as you would expect them to do with you.

14. Always shake hands.

Research from the Beckham Institute suggests that shaking someone's hand may increase the chances of having a positive interaction. Sandra Dolcos, the researcher behind the study, writes, "We found that it not only increases the positive effect toward a favorable interaction, but it also diminishes the impact of a negative impression. Many of our social interactions may go wrong for a reason or another, and a simple handshake preceding them can give us a boost and attenuate the negative impact of possible misunderstandings."

15. Follow up within 72 hours.

"If you've promised to send information or connect with someone, a good rule of thumb is to do it within 72 hours after the event," says expert networker Joshua Steimle. "Waiting any longer may unintentionally convey disinterest."

16. Focus on quality, not quantity.

Spending time engaging in meaningful conversations with a few people is often better than floating around the room engaging in short, superficial conversations. Aim to make real connections by asking questions, listening intently and moving beyond small talk, where appropriate.

17. Smile.

Smiling conveys happiness, openness and confidence; not to mention that smiling can actually help you feel happier. Smile liberally to make yourself as approachable as possible.

18. Bring business cards and other supplementary info.

This is a no-brainer, right? But it's good to have a reminder. Depending on the type of event, you may also want to bring pamphlets or other supplementary material to hand out.

19. Prepare your elevator pitch.

There's nothing worse than being asked the question, "What do you do?" and suddenly coming up blank. The idea of a traditional elevator pitch is a bit outdated, but the underlying strategy is still a good one: Come up with a few sentences you can use to accurately describe yourself or your business.

Being an effective networker means going into events with purpose and a plan. It also means being 100 percent committed to connecting authentically with those around you. It's not exactly rocket science, but a little bit of preparation before your next networking event could be what sets you apart from the pack.