



"Do You Hate Networking?" *by Betsy Berkhemer-Credaire*

That is the lament so often heard from many who would rather climb down a chimney than “work the room.” To help you get in the spirit, here are ten tips I use myself—and just in time—because December is the “Best Networking Time of the Year!”

’Tis the Season for networking from Thanksgiving to New Year’s Day—because every trade association, every chamber of commerce, every nonprofit organization and every company gives a holiday event for members, employees, sponsors and friends. People are in good spirits, and they also want to ignite business relationships.

Like any “Strategic Plan,” determine who you want to meet for business, what organizations those people belong to and check online calendars for their holiday events. Map out your holiday season—plan ahead—the advanced networker might cover two or three holiday events in one day during the holidays. But just one a day is okay for all of us! Or stage a small celebratory gathering yourself for your own clients and guests you want to meet at a festive location.

Before you arrive, use LinkedIn to find out more about members attending you want to meet. And when you are there, use your phone to quickly check out LinkedIn as needed. Are you looking for new business connections, or for someone to hire? Are you seeking a new job or a seat on a corporate or nonprofit board? Network with intention—focus on meeting people who will help achieve your pre-determined goal.

Befriend the folks at the Check-in Table—As you enter the event, look at the nametags displayed to see if your target persons have arrived and who is expected. Be friendly to those behind the desk and ask at what table your contact might be seated. With a little friendly conversation, they will let you peruse the whole guest list to see who's there.

Stock up on Business Cards—That means 50 for a small event or more than 100 for a large event. You will likely be sharing your card with people beyond those targets you plan to meet. Never run out of cards—not smart, also embarrassing.

Keep it Simple—the Rule of Three—You don't have to meet everyone in the room—just three target business leads at any one event. Keep it simple—set a goal of just three people, or target three specific companies, whom you want to meet—focus on finding them and starting a conversation. If you can, grab your phone to check LinkedIn for a hobby or university you may have in common—or serving on a nonprofit board—all are tools to start a conversation.

Even a non-original opening line actually works—"I have heard about you, and am pleased to finally meet you." You know about that person from LinkedIn. You may have friends in common. Take it from there.

Your Self-Description—(I call it a mix-match for “high-impact”) rehearse several parts that can be easily interchanged depending upon the conversation: Numbers are memorable—know the size of your industry (in millions or billions), your (public) company annual revenues, how many employees in the company and be ready to describe your role and your achievements (with some modestly as needed). Also use personal tidbits—like current champions of your favorite sports, or favorite concert you attended recently, or what you are cooking for the holidays. Spend time asking the other person about what they like to do and their achievements. Let them do most of the talking—you can listen for clues to build on.

How to exit from a conversation to move on without seeming rude—This is always an awkward moment, and each situation is different. When you feel it is time to move on, this is what I say: “It’s been great talking with you. I know we are both here to network and meet new friends. Let’s connect on LinkedIn. I look forward to hearing more about...(depends on situation). Hope you enjoy the holidays.”

Follow-up with some helpful information—During the conversation, determine what information (personal or business) would be helpful to them, and provide in your email follow-up as a favor. Note this on the back of their business card. You could send an article of common interest, make a connection to a contact of yours, or something else they may need. Follow-up within 48 hours, and you will be remembered. Sending emails to all the people you meet can be daunting, so just reach out to several whom you want to do business with.

Hope this gives you renewed holiday cheer about December. And here’s to a more profitable new year!

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