

How to conquer your fear of networking

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Not everyone in business are natural show ponies. Some are inherently shy, and while you don't need to be the loudest person at networking events, you still need to know how to work the room. After all, "it's not what you know, but who you know". Here are six steps to getting over the fear of networking:

First step - Find a function

Every industry has an industry body, or peak body that has functions for networking. If you know anyone who goes to such functions, ask to be their guest. They will love it and you have made one new contact already. Once at the meeting this person will no doubt introduce you to their friends. If you don't know anyone in an industry group, more bravery is required. Ring an industry body and ask for the date of the next meeting. Get yourself there and introduce yourself to the folks running the reception desk. Odds on someone will adopt you and introduce you to regular attendees.

Second step - Meet someone

Not always easy. What if you are in a room and no one talks to you? A certain amount of bravery is required here. Time is money and the aim is to get a return on your time by attending this function. Approach a small group that are conversing. They will usually invite you to join in. If not, move along to another group. This method has a high success rate because the others are also trying to network and they know that their next great contact could be you.

Third step - Introduce yourself

This may not be as easy as it sounds. Remember, every call is a sales call. Have your introduction practised. Believe it or not some folks actually fumble their own name. Say your name clearly and maybe just a little slower and clearer than usual. Exaggerate the syllables. Few come to a networking function to learn a tongue twister. Cut to the chase and say "my friends call me Sid".

Fourth Step - Present what you sell

Use your "elevator pitch". Def: "An elevator pitch, elevator speech, or elevator statement is a short summary used to quickly and simply define a process, product, service, organisation, or event and its value proposition".

Don't be put off because it sounds a bit rehearsed. It needs to be word perfect! You only have thirty seconds. "I am in the (broad description) business specialising in (narrow description) located somewhere close." Watch their face closely. What is the reaction? Mostly your new acquaintance will courteously ask further questions. This is the dangerous moment. You can now be trapped talking about you in detail. Networking is mixing with people who can become useful contacts. Avoid time wasters and yesterday's heroes in the form of folks out for the occasion.

Fifth Step - Qualify your lead

Having successfully introduced yourself and delivered your elevator speech it is time to qualify your prospect. Remember to stay focused. Every call is a sales call. As you finish your elevator pitch and listen for response if they don't say I need to work with you move to the next step. Don't linger or they will waffle. Break the pause with "Tell me what do you do...Bill"? Don't worry if you can't remember their name, use it to advantage. Look obviously at their name tag and read the first name slowly. Everyone loves to hear their name one more time. Your sales lead will now hopefully deliver their elevator speech. Listen carefully for clues of usefulness. No one is useless but remember that you are here for business.

Sixth Step - Close the sale

"That's most interesting Bill, can I give you my card?" This is the cheapest part of the night. Usually your new contact will respond in kind. Check out the card. If you thought "Bill" was a great lead his/her card should be confirmation. If not, thank him/her kindly and excuse yourself. Moving on is vital even if it looks a bit crass. Standard excuses are acceptable when networking. Polite excuses include "Excuse me I must touch base with someone over there" or if no one is around, "do you know where the toilets are?" Guaranteed to set you free!

Follow the steps above and watch how the other really successful networkers go. You might be surprised that with a bit of practice you too will be making a wider range of contacts for your business and maybe even meet some new friends.

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