



Connection Pros

Since the holidays are upon us, I want to continue talking about ways to overcome your discomfort when you are networking. The three examples I have listed below work great when you are at a business networking function. However, they also work perfectly in a non-business setting too. Many of you will be attending holiday functions this month and these tips will help make you feel more comfortable and relaxed.

Tip #1 One of the toughest things for timid networkers is to approach people they don't know and initiate conversation. The challenge is that when you introduce yourself to people, you normally say what you do and then they will say what they do. After that, unless there is an instant connection between your businesses, which almost NEVER happens, most conversations stall and this is where the discomfort begins. One line that has worked really well for me is "What do you like to do when you are not working?" This simple question has given the other people you are talking to permission to start talking about non-business topics and they will be grateful to you. Most people would rather talk about non-business topics because it's these topics that they have the most passion for and enjoy the most. Plus, it the non-business conversations where the best connections are made. You can learn about their hobbies, their families, their dreams and so much more. The sooner you start initiating conversations with people, the sooner you start connecting with these people and the sooner you will feel much more comfortable and confident.

Tip #2. Why is it that most people feel that you have to discuss business when you are attending a business networking function? Let me ask you. What do you enjoy talking more about? Your job or your business or all the things you like to do outside of your business? I'm assuming that most of you would prefer talking about your hobbies, your vacations, your families, your goals, dreams and desires, almost anything other than work. People will be thrilled that you are allowing them the opportunity to talk about those things that they really care about and have the greatest passions for. The best part about talking about all those things that have absolutely nothing to do with your job is the connections you will make with others. If you can't connect your business with someone else's business, you better come up with something else to talk about real quick or this could be a very short conversation. I have made more connections with others based on their hobbies and outside interests than what their job is. You need to take the time to learn about the person behind the business card.



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Remember, we aren't what we do for a living. It's just a job. Find out whom a person REALLY is, not just what they do and you've a much greater likelihood of creating a solid connection with them.

Tip #3. Another way you can become more comfortable and confident while you're networking is to avoid showing up fashionably late to a networking function or any function for that matter. Here is the challenge. When you show up late for an event, the room is typically filled with people who arrived on time and have been chatting with people for some time. They have gotten warmed up and they are networking machines. You, on the other hand, walk into the room, very uncomfortable because there are so many people that you don't know and those that you do know are already engaged in deep conversations with others. Not a great situation, is it?

Here is how you avoid this nerve racking situation. Show up for any and all functions 15 minutes early. By arriving early, you will get the chance to meet the people that put on the event before they are inundated with other guests. These people are typically the movers and shakers of the organization and they are the best people to connect with, especially if you are new to the organization. Another reason to show up early is so you can start networking with the 5-10 people in the room instead of the 50-100 people in the room. It is hard to walk into a room filled with people and to jump right into your networking mode. By having fewer people to start talking to, you can get warmed up slowly. Also, as you begin talking to others, not only will you feel more comfortable chatting with everyone, they will appreciate you talking to them so they can become more comfortable too.

I hope these tips make your holiday season great! I want to wish each and every one of you a very happy holiday and a happy New Year. See you next month.