10 Easy Ways to Be a Better Networker



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Let’s face it, networking can be a daunting aspect of the marketing journey. It’s like speed dating for business, but instead of finding a soulmate, you’re seeking clients, partners, referrals and mentors. You know you should do it, but it’s hard to get the ball rolling.

But fear not, because there are proven techniques that will help you navigate the world of business networking:

1. Be yourself

Well…unless you’re a serial criminal, then perhaps don’t be yourself, but for the rest of us, authenticity is key. Coming across with humility and genuineness is vital to make

connections with others. People can smell a fake a mile away, so don’t try to impersonate someone (provided you’re not Batman).

2. Build genuine relationships

The networking process is not a numbers game; it’s not about how many business cards you collect, but about real connections made. So, take the time to ask great questions and find common ground. (And if you find you both like cats, so much the better!) By taking the time to actually get to know people, you are more likely to build lasting connections.

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3. Follow up, but don’t be a stalker

You don’t want to be that person who sends 20 emails and calls 10 times in one day, but *do* make an effort to keep in touch with contacts. It’s crucial to follow up after a first meeting, for example, whether through a phone call, email or LinkedIn message. Maybe send a funny meme every now and then. (Who doesn’t love a good one of those?)

4. Be of service, but not a doormat

You want to help people, but you also want to make sure you’re not taken advantage of. This distinction is essential when serving others – a process that *doesn’t* mean sacrificing your well-being or allowing others to disrespect or push you to do something. Offer expertise and resources, by all means, but set boundaries, and if someone tries to sell you a timeshare, run.

5. Attend events energetically

Industry conclaves are, of course, great vehicles for meeting new people and making connections. That said, it can be tempting to simply hide in a corner with a plate of free appetizers, but that's not going to blaze a trail of progress. So, put on your best smile, grab a beverage and start mingling. And if someone spills their drink on you, don't worry: think of it as a form of liquid confidence.

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6. Leverage social media, but don't be a troll

Platforms like LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook can be great connection pathways – at once expanding your network and increasing visibility – but they can also be troll minefields, so use them wisely. Post helpful content and otherwise engage dynamically, and don't get into Twitter fights (trust me: they're not worth it).

7. Join the right networking groups

It's easy to believe that your newly-engaged social club will be a networking engine, but unless you simply need more friends, it's critical to join groups that align with your values and goals. You also want to focus on *real* networking, not just hanging out at a coffee klatch. True groups of this type provide both opportunities to meet other professionals and access valuable resources. Organizations like a chamber of commerce or a BNI provide a structure and focus that allows entrepreneurs to be more effective in outreach efforts.

8. Offer value, but not your organs

Make sure you're offering something of significance, but not giving away the farm, and such value could simply take the form of a helpful tool or a connection to someone in your network. Oh, and if someone asks for a kidney (either real or metaphorical), it's time to leave.

9. Utilize referrals, but don't be a name-dropper

Referrals can be a great way to expand a network, but don't go around dropping names like hotcakes. Be respectful of contacts' privacy and only make introductions when they make sense. And if someone drops a name you don't recognize, just smile and nod. It's okay: you can Google them later.

10. Maintain two-way info pathways, and with an open mind

It's great to attend gatherings focused on your industry or interests, as they provide an opportunity to interact with like-minded individuals and learn from experts in the field. Niche events can also give you insights into new trends and technologies that you might not have been aware of. But it's important to participate with an open mind. Don't dismiss people who may not have the same level of expertise or experience as you. Instead, approach conversations with a willingness to both learn from others and share your knowledge and insights.

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This process is really about building relationships and finding ways to help others, not simply promoting yourself, so

be genuine, listen actively and make *meaningful* connections. You never know where they might lead. Keep it real, be helpful and have a good time: After all, a smile is one of the best networking tools.

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