

Tips, Insights & Tactics

20 Golden Rules of Networking

Networking is about building relationships, earning trust and cultivating individual connections.

As you build your personal network, focus on quality. Quantity will follow naturally. When you think about networking, forget about short-term rewards. Focus your time and energy on the long-run.



1. Be Generous

The rewards of networking are numerous and mutual. Think of your relationships as investments. They only grow when you add more than you withdraw. Ask, more than tell. Give, more than take.

2. Think Long-Term Growth

Successful networking is a process. It's a goal, rather than an objective. Think of it as a form of marketing—highly personal, targeted and effective marketing—focused on your career and your current business. Invest a portion of your time and effort every week and your rewards will grow.

3. Start with a Strength

Some people have a natural talent for connecting. Others struggle in social situations. The good news is that networking is a skill that can be learned. Tap your strengths—thirst for knowledge, desire to help, interest in sharing best practices—to help anchor your approach.

4. Think Strategically

Make a list of all the networking opportunities available. Search the calendars of industry associations. Talk to people in your existing network. Prioritize the list and focus on the activities most likely to provide the greatest value for the time, effort and expense invested.

5. Ask for Clarification

If you're undecided whether to attend an event, contact its organizers with targeted questions. Are there specific people, or people from specific companies or industries, you'd like to meet?

6. Prepare for Success

Are you prepared to network? A little up-front planning before an event will pay huge dividends. Dress appropriately. If you're a little overdressed it won't hurt, but if you're underdressed it may work against you.

Equip yourself with business cards, pen and notepad (or smartphone with notes app), an idea of who you'd like to meet and half a dozen questions to help you start conversations.

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7. Know Your Audience

What about you? Memorize a short description of who you are, what you do and where you do it. Feel free to add why and how, but keep the description concise with emphasis on what's relevant to event attendees.

8. Seek Quality Over Quantity

Set a realistic objective for networking at events. Passing out ten or twenty business cards is usually not productive. Most will soon be discarded or forgotten. Instead, seek out two or three people you're genuinely interested in getting to know better.

9. Act Like a Leader

A great way to get the inside track at an event is to volunteer for registration or greeting. You'll quickly learn who's attending and who you'd like to follow up with later, when you're free. Your service will also provide a connection to event organizers—individuals you may want as part of your network.

Whether you're part of the event team or not, consider their mindset compared to an attendee. Adapt the helpful, positive attitude of an event team member if you need to shake off any anxiety over attending an event, where everyone else is a stranger.

10. Make it Easier

If meeting new people makes you nervous, arrive at the event early. It will be easier to make one-on-one connections with fewer people competing for attention, and will give you more time with your hosts.

11. Be Clear

If the event provides name tags, wear yours on the upper right, where it's easy to read while shaking hands or chatting. If the event requires you to fill out your own tag, print in clear, block letters. If space allows, include your company name.

12. Consider Cause and Effect

If you plan to have a drink at an event, don't arrive with an empty stomach. And before you grab a plate of appetizers, consider how you'll manage to shake hands, exchange cards or jot down a few notes if your hands are full.

13. Start with Confidence

When meeting someone new, smile, shake hands and repeat their name. If you want to join a group, jump in by asking permission to join their conversation. For a business event, add your own spin of these classic questions to start a conversation:

- What type of business are you in?
- What product or service from your company was recently announced?

- How would the ideal prospect for your product or service first hear about it?
- What do you hope to gain from attending this event?
- In what ways do you see our industry changing?

14. Adapt Your Individual Approach

Concentrate on engaging those you meet with an enthusiastic, positive outlook. Avoid controversial topics like politics. If you sense any reluctance to discuss a topic, switch subjects. Strive to give everyone the same level of respect, regardless of their position, and be sensitive to cultural differences.

15. Listen and Learn

Try to spend more time listening than speaking. Ask clarifying questions to seek deeper understanding. Sincere interest is a welcome compliment. And if you make a few notes about what you're hearing, it's even more flattering to the speaker.

16. Provide a Reminder

Before you give your business card to a new acquaintance, jot down a note on the back to personalize it. Reference the topic of your conversation, the name of the event where you met, or an invitation to connect on a social network, etc.

17. Make Yourself Memorable

After an event, follow up with any new contacts you'd like to add to your network, with a phone call or email. Better yet, the pleasure of a personal note delivered via traditional mail service will help you stand out from the crowd. The more timely your follow-up, the more memorable.

What to say? Remind your new contact where you met and briefly summarize your conversation. Ideas to build your relationship:

- Coffee or lunch invitation.
- Link to a relevant article (include a helpful summary).
- Share a completed project with relevant background on its development (non-proprietary only).
- Create a list of your top five business books read recently.
- Invitation to connect via a networking site like LinkedIn.

18. Get Organized

Many salespeople use contact managers to keep track of their suspects, prospects and customers. Why not follow their lead and take an organized approach to managing and scheduling your next follow-up with the people in your network?

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19. Tap the Web

Social media and other web-based services make it easier than ever to stay in touch with your network. Options include:

- Instant Messaging services or texts via smartphone are ideal for short, instantaneous, private exchanges.
- Video chat provides virtually face-to-face contact, or desktop sharing. Options run from free to subscription-based services.
- Online calendars offer on-demand access for clients, colleagues and friends to keep up with personal or group schedules, whenever they feel the need.
- Photo sharing services allow you to share collections publicly or with only those you grant access.
- Create a general or topic-specific website or blog for your network. Share your expertise and invite others to contribute.
- Web-based collaboration can be as simple as joining an online forum or a full-featured social networking site. Set up a thread or group where your network can interact, share information and exchange ideas.

20. Answer Opportunity's Call

Upcoming travel? Make a list of your contacts in or near your destination. Your schedules may not always align, but reaching out is nearly always appreciated and is a great way to gain insider's tips on where to go and what to see.

Make Your Advantage

Staying in touch requires effort. That's exactly why those that do, stand out from everyone else. Make networking a priority and you'll be rewarded many times over for the extra effort it requires to show the people in your network you've been thinking about them and value your relationship.

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