



New to Networking?

Overcome two of the most common barriers to networking success

It isn't uncommon to feel a little anxious when contemplating the need to network in order to promote yourself and your business. The process of networking can take people right out of the comfort zone!

Whilst there are many reasons to feel nervous, there are two key barriers to success to which many of us can relate.

"I want to try out a new group, but I don't know anyone there"

Well, you are not alone! Everyone who networks has to find a way to deal with this situation when they first join a new group.

You will find that some hosts are more sensitive to first-time nerves than others and may welcome you personally and introduce you to someone else when you first arrive. As hosts of a women's networking group in Reading, my colleague Mary Fraser and I are more than happy for people to let us know prior to the event if they are new to networking. Whilst our events are naturally geared towards easing the introduction process, most good hosts will help you to meet other group members, if asked.

Once at the meeting, you could also look for other people who appear not to know anyone either. They may not be 'mixing and mingling' much, preferring to observe from the sidelines.

Another useful technique to meet new people is to make your way to the bar or the food/ buffet area, if there is one. Invariably, there will be people waiting to be served, giving you the ideal opportunity to strike up a conversation.

"I would be OK with approaching someone, if only I knew what to say"

It's probably best to reserve any rehearsed introduction or elevator speech for later. A much easier approach is to start off by asking the other person open questions. These are questions that begin with 'what, when, how' type of question words and require a longer answer than a simple 'yes', or 'no'. "Excuse me, how are these meetings organised? This is my first visit to this group." Once a conversation has started, people will invariably introduce themselves and tell each other what they do.

Asking questions goes hand in hand with good listening skills! Try to listen very carefully in order to be able to ask the right questions. Allowing the interaction to develop in this way makes it flow more naturally and enables you to find out whether there is any synergy between you. Synergy will not develop from a simple exchange of business cards, but a process of getting to know each other and discovering what you may have in common.

Whilst these are very simple relationship building tools, practising them all the time, even at social events will stand you in good stead when it comes to networking.... anywhere!

Happy Networking!

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