

Networking Tips

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Get the most from a networking event by planning on doing more listening than talking. In order to do this, have a few starter questions for any conversation.

Remember that the point of networking events is not to sell. Mentally prepare yourself to have a conversation rather than have a transaction. Create a relationship where you can be considered valuable to the other person just as someday you may need them to help you.

Conversation Starters

“What is the most rewarding thing about your job?”

“What is the biggest challenge in your job?”

“If you could change something about your job, what would it be?”

“What was your path to get where you are today?”

“What advice would you have for a (young) professional like me?”

For any of the answers to these questions, it is important to listen to the response and have meaningful follow-up questions such as:

“That sounds interesting. What happened as a result of that?”

“That sounds challenging. How do you handle situations like that?”

“What have you learned from the positives/negatives of your job?”

Avoid questions that require just one word to answer: “How long have you been working at ___?” The answer is interesting, but if you start with those questions the response to their answer is too quickly back in your court.

Fielding Questions

Be ready for when he/she asks you questions about your current situation. Practice speaking about your situation in positive language.

“I’m just a student, but I will graduate in May,” could be rephrased, “I’m currently studying marketing at _____, and I look forward to graduating in May.”

“I’m in between jobs right now,” could be rephrased, “I was involved with _____ industry for some time, and now I am looking to transition to a new challenge. Specifically I’m looking for challenges in the _____, _____, or _____ industries.”

“I am starting a consulting business, but I haven’t decided in what field yet,” screams that you are networking to scout for potential clients without a central point of direction. While you might not be sure what direction you will go with your

consulting business, it is important to realize that very few clients want to be the guinea pig for a new consultant. You need to have many conversations with many professionals at various levels to understand underlying problems and recognize common themes.

Ending Conversations Skillfully

Another aspect to consider is how to end a conversation in a smooth way so that you can continue to meet other people. Here are a few thoughts:

Have business cards of some kind. Handing someone a business card will prompt them to want to give you their card as well. If they don't offer you one, do not be offended, but just move on.

"This conversation has been enlightening, and I really appreciate your time. Feel free to contact me if you have any other thoughts about _____ that you would like to share."

"Your perspectives have been very helpful to me, and I do not want to monopolize your time. Would you mind if I followed up with you if I have some questions later?"

Post-Networking

It is totally appropriate to follow up via email following a networking event. If you had a meaningful conversation with them, it is a good idea to reference something of value you found in the conversation. Many people say they will follow up and simply do not (I have been guilty of this myself sometimes).

After sending them an email, put them on your networking matrix with some notes to remind you of the conversation. Following a meaningful conversation, you should know their industry, role, challenges, things you have in common, etc., and you might even be able to envision ways that you could help them in the future and vice versa.