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Top Notch Networking Tips

From Cathy DeBerry, SCLSNJ adult services librarian

Cathy is a 21st century librarian who finds herself networking with small business owners and business professionals on a regular basis. With a Masters in Library Science from Rutgers University and Bachelors in Social Sciences, Cathy has had to work diligently to cultivate networking skills, and she's become SCLSNJ's "networker extraordinaire."



1. Always **carry business cards**. Lots of them.
2. **Dress the part**. Unless you are networking with Mick Jagger or other rock musicians, it is never appropriate to wear jeans and a ripped t-shirt to a networking event. What you wear is determined by the event: if it's a speed networking event where you may meet potential future employers, wear a suit; if it is less formal, consider business casual. Always carry a blazer or jacket so you can dress up if you need to. Pay attention to the fit of your clothing. And, ladies, make sure that hemline is at your knee or below if wearing a dress or skirt.
3. Check the sports scores and the latest entertainment news. **Become a master of small talk**. I am often one of four women in a room surrounded by men - so I make sure I can hold my own talking about the Jets and Giants.
4. Still uncomfortable with small talk? **Ask open ended questions**: What do you do for a living? How is business going?
5. *Still* uncomfortable with small talk? **Prepare in advance**. Plan some questions to break the ice.
6. Wear yellow. It will help you get noticed. If you can't wear yellow, **choose your colors wisely**. Bright colors inspire confidence. Pastel colors inspire reassurance. Avoid beige, black and white. I like to wear bright colors because people will remember me better - plus it photographs well.
7. **Avoid the hard sell**. It makes people uncomfortable. If you lead with the hard sell, you will irritate your business contact. It is important to build trust to establish a long term mutually beneficial business relationship. Take your time.



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8. If you feel as if you really connected with someone, **follow up within a few days and never with the hard sell** (unless you were specifically asked for sales information). Send a quick note saying it was nice to meet you or even an article or some information that is relevant to the contact's business (but, again, avoid information that pushes your business). Consider building a relationship or rapport with contacts using social media. Bonus tip: if you're not on social media, you should be.
9. Networking with the same people regularly? Try to **remember something personal about the people you network with** such as their daughter's wedding or where their son was accepted to college or when he will be graduating.
10. **Try to share personal stories**, as long as it's appropriate. It will make you memorable.
11. **Never discuss politics, religion, or share off color jokes** - even if someone else is.
12. It is more beneficial to **have two to three in-depth conversations with a few individuals** than to meet everyone in the room.
13. **Be prepared to give your 30 second elevator speech** stating who you are, what you do, and why you are attending the event.
14. **Practice, practice, practice.** The more events you attend, the easier it gets.
15. Not dominating the conversation? That is entirely OK. You are more memorable and better appreciated as a listener. Most people love talking about themselves. **Practice active listening.** Remember, there is a difference between listening and simply waiting to respond.
16. Sometimes you are going to have an off day. **If you do have an off day, try to use it as a learning experience.** Think about what didn't work well and how you would do it differently next time.
17. **Pass along referrals.** A connection to the person you are speaking with may not benefit you but it may benefit someone else. Pass that connection on.
18. **It is better to give than to receive.** You will benefit more in the long run if you ask, "How can I help you?" Do someone a favor even if you will get nothing in return.
19. **Arrive early if possible.** As an early arriver, you have a chance to engage one-on-one with a few attendees before all of the noise and bustle sets in. You also have the luxury of making the first impression in people's mind.
20. **Patience is a virtue.** It's not going to happen overnight. It can take months of networking to develop a mutually beneficial relationship.



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