

Networking Tips 5: Top 12 Suggestions for Shy Networkers

Eric Pye

In survey after survey, public speaking is top of the list of people's admitted fears. For shy people, being in a room surrounded by people you don't know but *want* to know is probably a close second. That said, networking is a modern requirement of job-seeking and career-building in almost any profession. Here are a few tips to make face-to-face networking a little easier:

1. **Set a goal:** Before arriving at an event, decide how many people you want to meet. Make it a game – you can't leave until you hand out a pre-determined number of business cards. Start small and increase your goal over time. This will help you get used to networking and eliminate some anxiety along the way.
2. **Be fearless:** Approach, shake hands, introduce yourself, ask what the person does, and shut up. People love to talk about themselves, so let them. Being quiet means you don't have to come up with things to talk about and you can take their conversational lead!
3. **Attend events with a "wing man":** Going to an event with a friend or colleague will help relax you. If this person is outgoing and confident, great! They can introduce you to people they know or have met already, and encourage you to hand out business cards on your own. Just make a pact that they'll leave you to chat once you're introduced, otherwise they may dominate the conversation.
4. **Volunteer:** Sign up to volunteer for meetings or events you plan to attend anyway. This allows you to meet a larger range of people and gives you something to do during idle time. It also helps eliminate the need for small talk because you're already contributing in a larger capacity.
5. **Network online:** Before going to an event, find out who will be there and send them a tweet or LinkedIn comment that you are looking forward to seeing them. This will get your name out there and give you and the people you plan to meet a sense of familiarity when you do connect in person.
6. **Be prepared:** Don't forget to bring your business cards to meetings and events (and resumes if it's an event related to job search). It also helps if you have a short (30-45 second), natural sounding "[Elevator Pitch](#)" about yourself memorized and ready to deliver.
7. **Role play:** If you are nervous before an event, try role playing with a friend. Pretend you are meeting and introduce yourself. Let your friends give you feedback and make sure they are being honest.
8. **Get there early:** Don't start your networking adventure by arriving to events "fashionably late". It's harder for introverts to create a presence once a room is crowded and everyone is already in small groups. Get there before the groups form to make sure you aren't left out of the mix.
9. **Be well-read:** Keep up with current events and business trends. This gives you a range of topics to draw from in terms of conversational topics.
10. **If the conversation isn't working, let the person go:** Excuse yourself if your partner has lost interest or rapport isn't building. Say, "Nice meeting you; we should probably mingle more... thanks for chatting!" and release them. Don't cling to someone just because it's easier than making another introduction.
11. **Follow up:** Sharing helps create relationships; if you promised to send a report, share a website or introduce a contact, make sure you stick to your word and don't wait too long. Try to contact everyone you met, even if it's just to say thank you for an interesting chat, within a week of the event.
12. **Be yourself:** Last but not least, don't hide who you really are. It's okay to be quiet and avoid being the center of attention. Own it, and use these tips to get ahead in your own way.

Doing all of the above may be overwhelming at first, so pick two or three ideas and start with those. Just because you're on the quiet side doesn't mean you can't create a vibrant, productive network. With practice, you may even find that you enjoy meeting others, and can start helping others learn how, too.