

# Successful Networking for Introverts

March 29, 2016

by Teresa Riccobuono

*Advisor Perspectives welcomes guest contributions. The views presented here do not necessarily represent those of Advisor Perspectives.*

Before we know it, the first quarter of 2016 will be behind us. If you are not on track to reach your new client acquisition goal, here's a way to close the gap. Networking is an often feared, but impactful way to generate new leads.

For advisors, the most common networking opportunity is a meeting, such as one organized by the Chamber of Commerce. Here's how to successfully "work" the room – even if you don't like networking.



## Re-think the idea of networking

Think of networking as making friends on purpose: connecting with someone first as a person, not as a potential client. Don't have an agenda when you meet someone; just relax and enjoy the interaction.

Of those who walk into a room where an event is being held, 93% feel shy. You are not the only one feeling apprehensive.

Don't wait until you need something to start networking. Start today, and begin making friends on purpose.

## Tips on networking

Arrive early and act like a host, welcoming people as they arrive, chatting with them and if appropriate, introducing them to others. Pick three people who interest you the most. Spend additional time with them throughout the evening.

Don't arrive hungry. Eat before you arrive, or arrive early and eat. You want to have your hands free during the event. There is nothing more awkward than trying to shake hands, get your business card out or take notes when your hands are full. In addition, you will have time to check your teeth to be sure they are free from food and freshen your breath.

Make sure you have your business cards available and easily accessible. Have a pen and small note pad handy as well.

Arrive to the event with a goal or intention. Your goal is not to hand out as many business cards as you

can. This is very unproductive. We like to help people and work with people we know, like and trust. We can't get to know someone who hands us a business card and then is off and running to hand out their next card. Depending on the length of the event, your goal should be to make two to three good connections. If I come away from an event with one good connection, I consider the event a success.

It is okay to attend with a friend or colleague, but don't spend the entire evening with him or her. As a team, you have an opportunity to connect with a greater number of people, and your friend may make a connection with someone who could be a terrific client for you. If so, she can introduce you.

Let your focus be on the other person. Be genuinely interested, and ask questions. Look for common ground, which shows similarities between you. I have included a list of questions that you can keep tucked in the back of your mind to help if the conversation begins to lag. Adjust the questions based on the situation.

### **Have a reason to follow up**

It is always easier to contact someone if you have something specific to discuss. During the conversation, listen for opportunities to follow. It could be something as simple as the name of a restaurant, a web-site resource or the name and author of a book. It might be to set up a time to meet for coffee.

Your ultimate goal is to set a time to meet or chat to see if the services you provide are of benefit to them and if you can be a resource to them in some way.

If the person you are speaking with asks about you, be polite and answer their question(s), but try to turn the attention back to them. Remember, the best conversationalists are those who listen. You will gain more respect in social and business circles when you demonstrate good listening skills. Participate, but don't monopolize the conversation.

A good conversationalist engages others and stimulates the conversation. Keep up with trends and current events so you'll have something meaningful to talk about. Take a keen interest in others, but also live an interesting life of your own. Try new things. Accept unusual invitations. Volunteer for causes that interest you. Go back to school. Read. Meet new challenges, and then share your experiences. But again, don't dominate the conversation.

### **Don't feel obligated to continue a conversation that is going nowhere**

To excuse yourself from the conversation, you can use a closing phrase like, "It was nice speaking with you. I guess I'd better go mingle some more. Enjoy the evening." You can also say, "Excuse me. I have to visit the restroom," or, "Would you excuse me? I'm going to say hello to our host/a friend I haven't seen in a while."

### **Follow up**

It doesn't matter what format you use for your follow up. What matters is implementation and follow through.

Some people use file folders and a calendar to keep track of their follow-up activities; some have found a binder to be a good option, and many use a contact management system on their computer. Use whatever system is easiest for you. Again, implementation and follow through will offer the most rewards, so use what works for you.

Okay, now what?

You followed my advice and made a good connection with a gentleman you met at a Chamber of Commerce meeting. You exchanged business cards because this gentleman expressed an interest in learning more about your services.

That same day, make a note on his business card. Note where you met, the date and what you promised to do (i.e., send a copy of your introductory packet).

The next day at the latest, make as many notes in your contact management system of any and all information regarding this contact, even information regarding his family or whatever you garnered from the conversation.

You want to have as much information available to you as possible.

Also, send the information you mentioned. Don't procrastinate. You are a professional and are on top of things.

Include a note that says you enjoyed speaking with him, that you hope he takes an interest in the information you provided and that you will follow up with him next week to see if he has any questions or would like additional information. Think about additional contact opportunities for the future, and include this in your note.

In your contact management system, put a reminder to follow up with him one week out. That means, if today is the 7th, make yourself a reminder to follow up on the 14th. Make note of what you sent. Review this information and your notes just prior to making the call on the 14th. Notice I said "call" and not email. Email has become the common mode of communication. A telephone call stands out in today's world.

This is how you can make a connection without it feeling like a cold call. He requested information from you. You provided it, along with an offer to follow up with him. That is very professional.

When the day comes to call him, remember, do not try to sell yourself too strongly.

You are following up on the information you sent and asking if he has any questions.

Ask him about himself, his business and anything pertinent to your prior conversation at the Chamber of Commerce meeting. Remember to fall back on the widget questions (below) if needed. This is your opportunity to gather information that will be helpful to you in future conversations.

Try to have something else to follow up on. This could even be information he now owes you. If this is the case, give him a week to get it to you. Put a reminder into your contact management system for a week out. If you don't receive the information, give him a reminder call or email.

Build rapport without sounding salesy, anxious or desperate. Ask questions, and be genuinely interested. Most people enjoy talking about themselves, their background and their business. Pay attention to what he is saying to see if he mentions anything with which you might be able to help.

Make notes about your conversation, send any information he requested and continue following up using your contact management system, keeping the focus on him and how you can be of service to him.

Soon you will be able to determine if this person is a good prospect for you. If so, continue on that path. If not, maybe you made a new friend, or maybe this gentleman knows someone who could use your services. He may become a good referral source for you.

Each conversation and the notes you take will help you determine how the relationship should progress.

Remember, with those individuals you would like to connect with later, have a reason to follow up.

## Summary

- Go with intention
- Be genuinely interested in others
- Ask good questions
- Take good notes (mentally during the event and documented after the event)
- Find a reason to follow up
- Follow up
- Continue to follow through
- Decide the outcome--potential client, referral source, friend, something else

If you follow these steps and network regularly, you will always have a pipeline chock full of prospects.

Don't be scared or nervous about attending networking events. Avoiding rejection isn't productive. Rejection won't kill you.

## Ten networking questions that work every time

Compliments of Bob Burg, author of *Endless Referrals*

1. *How did you get your start in the widget business?*

People like to be the Movie of the Week in someone else's mind. "I worked my way through college, then started in the mail room and finally began the fascinating career of selling widgets." Let them share their story with you while you actively listen.

2. *What do you enjoy most about your profession?*

Again, it's a question that elicits a good, positive feeling. And it should get you the positive response you are seeking. By this time, you have him on a roll.

3. *What separates you and your company from the competition?*

I call this the permission to brag question. All our lives we are taught not to brag about ourselves and our accomplishments, yet you have given this person carte blanche to do so.

4. *What advice would you give someone just starting in the widget business?*

This is my mentor question. Don't we all like to feel like a mentor, to feel that our answer matters? Give your new networking prospect a chance to feel like a mentor by asking him this question.

5. *What one thing would you do with your business if you knew you could not fail?*

This is a paraphrase of a question from noted theologian and author Dr. Robert Schuller, who asks, "What one thing would you do with your life if you knew you could not fail?" We all have a dream, don't we? What is this person's dream? The question gives him a chance to fantasize. He will appreciate the fact that you cared enough to ask. And you will notice that people always take a few moments to really ponder before they answer.

6. *What significant changes have you seen take place in your profession through the years?*

Asking people who are a little bit more mature in years can be perfect because they love answering this question. They have gone through the computer age, the takeover of fax machines and the transition from a time when service really seemed to matter.

7. *What do you see as the coming trends in the widget business?*

I call this the speculator question. Aren't people who are asked to speculate usually important, hot-shot types on television? You are therefore giving them a chance to speculate and share their knowledge with you. You are making them feel good about themselves.

8. *Describe the strangest or funniest incident you have experienced in your business.*

Give people the opportunity to share their war stories. That's something practically everyone likes to do, isn't it? Don't we all have stories we like to share from when we began in business? Something very embarrassing happened that certainly wasn't funny then but is now. The problem is that most people don't get the chance to share these stories. You, however, are actually volunteering to be that person's audience.

9. *What have you found to be the most effective for promoting your business?*

Again, you are accentuating the positive in this person's mind while finding out something about the way he thinks. However, if you happen to be in the advertising field, absolutely do not ask this question. Why? Because right now it would be a probing question, and it would be perceived as such by your networking prospect. Eventually you will get to ask that question, but not now.

10. *What one sentence would you like people to use in describing the way you do business?*

Almost always, the person will stop and think really hard before answering this question. What a compliment you have paid him. You've asked a question that, quite possibly, the people who are closest to him have never thought enough to ask.

And don't forget the all important question.

11. *How can I know if someone I'm talking to is a good prospect for you?*

Personally, I love it when people ask me this question. It shows me that they truly understand networking. It is not just about what you can gain from the other person; it's about how you can help one another.

You may be wondering if a person will feel as though you are being nosey asking these questions during a first meeting. The answer is no. Remember, you won't get to ask more than just a few of these questions during your initial conversation. More importantly, these are questions people enjoy answering.

As I mentioned before, keep these questions in the back of your mind in case you need to keep the conversation going. Decide on your favorites and practice asking them in your own words. Adjust the questions based on the situation.

*For the past 18 years, Teresa Riccobuono has been a professional organizer, business consultant and practice-management specialist to the financial services industry, helping advisors bridge the gap between their existing and their ideal financial planning practice. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area but works with advisors across the country. She is a member of the board of directors of the East Bay Chapter of the Financial Planning Association and is currently the co-chair of the Public Relations committee. She can be reached at [teresa@simplyorganized.com](mailto:teresa@simplyorganized.com).*