



How to Network Successfully as an Introvert

Five tips to have fun and get results

by Elizabeth J. Agnew, MS

For us introverts out there, the idea of networking doesn't exactly get our blood moving. As networking becomes more and more an integral part of my professional growth, I'm finding that (and I never thought I'd say this) I am actually beginning to enjoy it. And that right there is the main reason why I'm successful with my networking efforts. In this article I'll share with you five tips for networking success – as an introvert!

First, let's get something cleared up. Being an introvert does NOT mean that you lack social skills. I'll repeat: being introverted does not mean that you aren't a "social" person. We all are. Being an introvert simply means that you get your energy from within – when you need to recharge, you find a way to be alone. Being around people tends to use our energy, rather than charge us up. That's all.

So all you closet introverts can come out now. If you can embrace your introversion, you'll see that there are true benefits to being one: you tend to have a solid relationship with yourself, you're grounded and sensitive to your surroundings, and you value deeper connections, to name a few. Embracing your introversion means you'll be able to leverage it in networking situations. The five tips below show you how.

1. **Arrive ready.** As introverts, this type of engagement tends to use up our energy, so make sure you have a surplus when you arrive! Be well rested, well fed, and well hydrated. And if you notice you're missing one of those things, excuse yourself for a 5-minute timeout and take care of yourself. Then you can re-focus your energy on your new friends rather than on your growling stomach.

2. **Think quality, not quantity**

Already, your being an introvert is advantageous. Because we tend to prefer fewer, deeper relationships rather than numerous casual acquaintances, we can bring that desire into a networking situation. No one has said the key to networking successfully is to get as many business cards as you can in the least amount of time. If you're having a great conversation with someone, then stay put!

Let your goal be to make one solid connection for the evening that you'll want to continue into the future. If it's a multiple-day event, make your goal 3 – 4 solid connections. Now you can relax. Let go of the need to compete for contacts and let fate do its work in deciding the few people you'll get to truly know.

3. **Stay curious**

Introverts tend to prefer intimate, deep conversation rather than superficial small talk, which is one we reason we are typically allergic to networking. But how to come up with things to talk about that will get you past the small talk smokescreen? Fear of small talk is exactly why I used to get stuck in the "I don't feel like going" rut. I got out of it by staying curious.

Human beings are naturally curious creatures, so once you learn to listen to your inner curiosity, it will be your ally in carrying the conversation. The person you're chatting with has a rich life story

with details you can't begin to imagine! Find out about it. Staying connected to your natural curiosity will help you stay engaged during the event.

4. Get real

When you're doing all the curiosity-searching and questioning, make it juicy! Take risks! Dance next to the line – without crossing it, of course. Let this “stranger” know that you are a real person – sometimes with family tiffs, parking tickets, and pet peeves! It will lighten the mood, foster trust, and be something to help them remember you.

If you're someone who finds networking boring, this tells me that you need to move WAY closer to this proverbial line I'm talking about. As long as you remain respectful and avoid offending the person, this is what makes networking fun. One way to get real is to tell the truth – tell them how you *really* felt about the presentation, or how business is *really* going (without being a whiner – keep it polite and intelligent). Tell them about your trials and tribulations, or funny mishaps. Keep it short, and then ask about them. Break the ice with candor, and invite them to follow suit.

5. Follow up

This is where your efforts can really pay off, or not. The fact that we introverts tend to make fewer, closer connections makes it easier and more comfortable to follow up. Include personal touches to your follow-up email or card to avoid making this process feel too mechanical. If you followed the tips above, you should have an interesting tidbit to cite that will remind you both of your connection.

When you follow up, take initiative in getting to know the person more. I recommend doing this even if you're not sure you want to – remember, everyone has a story and theirs is fuller than you think. If they're local, meet for lunch or coffee. If they're too far, send articles or tidbits when they remind you of the person. Simply sending with a note saying “this made me think of you” is enough.

Ultimately, networking doesn't have to feel fake. Stay reminded of the original reason people decided to get together: to make connections. Let your goal be to foster true human connection, and do that the best way you know how.



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