

GUIDE TO SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING A NETWORKING EVENT

If you haven't attended a networking event before, the task might sound daunting. If you have, you know they are energizing and exhausting. The keys to successfully navigating networking events include: Preparation, Attendance, Etiquette and Follow up. Those four keys to successfully attending a network event can be found below.

Job networking events come in all shapes and sizes. They could include:

- Professional conferences
- Tech-focused speaker seminars
- MeetUps
- College alumni programs
- Company open houses
- Career fairs
- Diversity groups
- Young professionals events
- Luncheons
- Golf tournaments

Regardless of their format, at the heart of each event is the opportunity to meet, interact and create a rapport with other individuals working in the tech industry. People make small talk, share ideas and exchange business cards. Don't let fear or lack of knowledge about how to properly utilize networking events keep you from incorporating them into your job search strategy.

Preparation

- *Identify your purpose:* What is your goal in attending this event? What are the outcomes you hope to achieve, such as meeting three new people, learning about a particular company or introducing yourself to a specific person you know is attending?
- *Dress to impress:* Ask an event organizer what the attire is (professional, business casual, casual). Even if it's casual dress, look your best. Present a clean, confident appearance.
- *Practice your pitch:* Identify what you want people to know about you when they meet you. Be ready to briefly discuss your technical background, boot camp experience, and other interesting industry-related topics. For example, if you meet someone working at a company of interest, share what was recently mentioned on the company's Twitter feed.

GUIDE TO SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING A NETWORKING EVENT

- *Bring business cards:* The answer to whether or not business cards are still relevant in the digital world varies. But you can make the argument they've survived for centuries for a reason. Business cards offer a quick, effective, easy mechanism for exchanging contact information. If anything, advances in technology allow users to develop very creative cards (think QR codes, vCards, magnets and 3D printer creations).

Attendance

- *Don't succumb to the "Spotlight Effect."* The trickiest part of a networking event can be the entrance - walking solo into a room filled with people, most of whom are complete strangers and already engaged in conversation. You feel "everyone's eyes" on you. The actual number of people giving you a second glance is significantly lower than you think. Enter with confidence - not nearly as many people are looking at you to suggest you should feel otherwise.
- *Find the food.* Make your way to the appetizers table. It's where most people congregate and make small talk about the food, and it can be a great conversation ice breaker. Use caution if alcohol is being served. It's best to consume alcoholic beverages in very small amounts or refrain from drinking altogether.
- *Take the lead with introductions.* Say hello with a smile, solid eye contact and firm handshake, clearly speaking your first and last name. Listen for the other person's name. Don't hesitate to ask them to repeat if necessary - doing so could spare embarrassment later on.
- *Listen.* The purpose of attending a networking event isn't to talk to as many people as possible, but engage in brief, meaningful conversation. The difference is listening to what the other person is saying at that moment, rather than focusing on your next question or who else you plan to talk to.
- *Ask open-ended questions.* The best way to keep the conversation going is avoiding questions that can be answered with a yes or no. Examples include:
 - What company do you work for and what do you do?
 - How do you like working for your company?
 - What projects are you currently working on?
 - How did you get involved in (web development, programming, etc.)?
 - What did you think of the (guest speaker, round table discussion, opening remarks, etc.)?

GUIDE TO SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING A NETWORKING EVENT

- *Keep your pitch brief.* When asked about your background, briefly state it (two or three sentences). Answer questions sincerely and don't overuse industry jargon. You want to be engaged, not an expert.
- *Think quality not quantity.* Having conversation with three people in one evening is much more successful than randomly shaking hands and exchanging business cards with 10 people.
- *Take notes.* After meeting with someone, write down a brief note on the back of their business card regarding your conversation. Doing so will help you later when you follow up.

Etiquette

Don't engage in any of the following behaviors before, during or after a networking event. Engaging in any of the following behaviors listed below is the quickest way to experiencing a negative experience.

- *Dressing inappropriately.* If professional dress is the requested attire, showing up in jeans or khakis helps you stand out for the wrong reasons. Above and beyond dress code, make sure your hair, nails and facial hair are groomed, makeup is minimal and jewelry is conservative. Women should avoid low-cut shirts, short skirts and tight fitting clothes.
- *Consuming large amounts of food or alcohol.* Food and drink are the backdrop, not the centerpiece. Alcohol causes people to behave and talk in ways they otherwise wouldn't. The best approach might be to refrain from drinking alcohol at all.
- *Barging into a discussion.* There is a difference between joining a conversation and interrupting one. Use a polite approach by asking "Hi, do you mind if I join your conversation?" It makes a better impression than walking up and immediately adding to the topic being discussed.
- *Monopolizing someone's time.* Unless the person you're speaking with is very engaged and interested in keeping the conversation going, engage in discussion for no longer than 10 minutes, thank the person for their time and part ways.
- *Focusing on you.* Networking involves actively listening and talking. Failing to ask questions, or completely dominating the conversation gives the impression you're only interested in how the conversation benefits you.

GUIDE TO SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING A NETWORKING EVENT

- *Forgetting to follow up.* A networking event is a springboard to further networking opportunities. Contact those you meet to arrange future face-to-face meetings.

Follow up

- *Send follow up emails.* Send emails to those you met. Here's where the business card notes you took come in handy. Refer to your conversation to personalize the email.
- *Connect via LinkedIn.* Revisit LinkedIn to locate the people you spoke with. Send a LinkedIn invite requesting to connect with them. Make the invite personal (reference meeting them at the event).
- *Request informational interviews.* In the thank you email, ask the person if they would be willing to meet briefly to discuss in further detail their (job, background, company, etc.).
- *Keep growing the network you've started.* When you connect via LinkedIn with people you met, research their LinkedIn connections to see if there is anyone with whom you'd also like to connect with. During your informational interviews, ask if there is anyone else the person might suggest you contact. Look for other networking events to attend.