

13 TIPS TO MAKE YOUR NEXT NETWORKING EVENT A SUCCESS

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You know that networking is vital for your career, but you may still be hesitant to attend networking events. Maybe you've had your share of expensive conferences that seemed like a waste of time. Maybe you're wondering if LinkedIn and other social media are enough on their own.

The truth is that face to face communications still carry more weight than emails and texts. Plus, events can be an efficient way to meet a large number of potential contacts in a short time.

Come home from your next networking event with something more valuable than a pile of business cards and memories of free cheese. Read these tips so you'll know what to do before, during, and after your meeting.

Preparing for a Networking Event:

1. **Be selective.** Choose events that are likely to give you the highest return on your investment. **Figure out your goals for the event** and develop screening criteria. Maybe you want to stay updated on the latest industry news or you're trying to land new clients.
2. **Dress the part.** Appearances count. If you're not sure what to wear, check the website and promotional materials to get an idea of what's appropriate.
3. **Carry business cards.** When you're meeting so many potential contacts at once, exchanging business cards is much quicker than entering data into your phone.

Talk with a graphic designer if you think your print materials need an upgrade.

4. **Rehearse your lines.** Practice your elevator pitch and some relevant small talk. **You need to be able to introduce yourself in a confident and interesting way.** It also helps to have a few subjects on hand that you can discuss to build rapport.

5. **Volunteer your services.** Helping out at events can be a great way to reduce your expenses and become engaged even if you tend to feel shy. Contact the organizers to find out about volunteer opportunities.

Attending a Networking Event:

1. **Focus on giving. Effective networking is based on being generous.** Potential contacts are more likely to welcome your interest if you're thinking about what you can do for them.
2. **Mix and mingle.** Resist any urge to sit on the sidelines. Move around the room so you can meet as many colleagues as possible.
3. **Make introductions.** If you already know some of the attendees, think about who they might like to meet. Providing introductions strengthens your network and makes it likely you'll receive similar favors. You can also introduce people you just met to help keep conversations flowing.
4. **Refine your presentation. Networking events are about building relationships** rather than selling, so they can help you edit your elevator pitch with less at stake. You'll also have a wide audience to work with.

Following Up After a Networking Event:

1. **See it through.** Any event can be productive if you take strategic action with the contacts you just made. That might mean sending them an article or inviting them out for coffee.
2. **Act quickly.** Reach out as soon as possible so your last conversation will be fresh in their mind. You'll make a positive impression and their interest may still be high.
3. **Strengthen your online presence.** Social media like LinkedIn works well in combination with face to face communications. Invite the contacts you made to connect with you online.
4. **Evaluate your efforts.** Developing your networking skills is an ongoing project. After each event, reflect on what went well and what you want to do differently next time.

Going to network events may require a substantial amount of time and money, but the opportunities are worth it. Connecting with others can help you to increase your job satisfaction, advance your career, or grow your business.