



Book Networking for People Who Hate Networking

A Field Guide for Introverts, the Overwhelmed, and the Underconnected

Devora Zack
Berrett-Koehler, 2010
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Recommendation

Author Devora Zack identifies herself as a bona fide, “off-the-chart” introvert. Even though she makes her living presenting to large groups, she prefers to be alone engaging in solitary pursuits. She likes serene reflection more than multidecibel excitement. Happy hours do not make her happy. Nevertheless, she is a networking expert who teaches introverts how to build connections. Her goal is to help them actually learn to love networking, but how well her techniques work for you may depend on just how deeply introverted you are. It’s hard to make networking palatable to someone who regards a group of strangers with unmitigated terror as opposed to general unease. Yet, this is a good, solid book and Zack’s ideas are sensible. Even if some of her suggestions may not be workable for every introvert, *BooksInShort* believes her advice will help many people become better networkers.

Take-Aways

- Networking is an essential business activity.
- People mistakenly assume that all introverts are shy and retiring.
- They generally are “reflective, focused and self-reliant.”
- Extroverts like networking because they are verbal, expansive and social.
- “Centroverts” are at the median of the extroversion-introversion scale.
- For introverts and some other people, networking triggers a “fight-or-flight” internal response.
- Introverts can leverage certain personal strengths to become superior networkers.
- To muster their assets, they should use the “3Ps” – pausing, processing and pacing.
- To deal with uncomfortable feelings at networking events, smile and breathe deeply.
- Follow the “platinum rule” when networking: Treat people as they wish to be treated.

Summary

Innie or Outie?

Are you an introvert or an extrovert? Introverts tend to be:

- “Reflective.”
- “Focused.”

- “Self-reliant.”

Extroverts generally are:

- Verbal.
- Expansive.
- Social.

Much misinformation exists about these disparate personality types. Personality traits mistakenly assigned to introverts include being antisocial, moody and isolated. One of the biggest misconceptions is that introverts are shy while extroverts are outgoing. In fact, the reverse is often true. And then there are “centroverts,” who fall between introverts and extroverts. Introverted people often find networking difficult, and in fact, an introvert truly might be “uncomfortable making small talk,” but networking is a crucial activity in modern business. It’s tough to get ahead without it. Introverts, extroverts and centroverts must network, like it or not.

“The creation of lasting, real connections and the discovery of connectivity is the new, improved way to build a strong, lasting network.”

If you are an introvert, you don’t have to hate networking. You can learn to enjoy it by employing three techniques known as “the 3Ps: pause, process and pace.” They follow the principle that “quality networking is really about connecting.” The 3 P’s are significant because introverts actually often possess strengths that can make them superb networkers.

“Introversion is not pathology!”

“The 3Ps”:

- **Pause: “Introverts think to talk”** – Introverts think before they speak. They are “reflective” and need adequate time to muster their thoughts. “Introversion is about what goes on internally, not what is observed externally.” Introverts take time before they interact socially. They strategize the approaches they want to take, consider all their options and review their goals before they initiate action. These pausing techniques are ideally suited to networking.
- **Processing: “Introverts go deep”** – Introverts like to focus intently on what they do. As a result, they are selective as to their use of time. Introverts want to understand the topic (or person) in front of them. When introverts attend a conference, their inclination is not to go buzzing around, introducing themselves to everyone at the event. Instead, they prefer to focus on one or two individuals and then work hard to get to know them. This processing approach serves networking well.
- **Pacing: “Introverts energize alone”** – Extroverts focus on the world and the people around them, whereas “self-reliant” introverts direct their attention inwardly. At a networking event, introverts use their strengths to establish strong connections with selected individuals, back off temporarily to recharge and then repeat the process. This is an ideal formula for effective networking.

The Scourge of Networking

Much of the reason why people hate to network has to do with the human built-in fight-or-flight response. In prehistoric days, people would immediately react physiologically in the face of unexpected predators. The fight-or-flight mechanism instantly would kick in – and a good thing too, because otherwise people quickly would end up as dinner for their hungry pursuers. While the times certainly have changed, this fight-or-flight switch still turns on immediately when people are uncomfortable or find themselves in daunting situations such as networking events.

“Strong introverts crave alone time...as if it were oxygen in the lungs for survival.”

When the fight-or-flight mechanism takes over, blood quickly rushes from the brain to the arms and legs. This helps give them power for fighting or running away. At the same time, breathing turns shallow. These abrupt physiological changes dramatically affect demeanor. Scared people find it difficult to appear relaxed or composed. Their thinking becomes muddy. They feel tense and nervous. Considering all of this, it’s no wonder many people dislike conferences, social gatherings and other networking events.

“When an introvert bonds with another person, the introvert frequently becomes quite chatty.”

There is a way around this dilemma. Breathing deeply and evenly enhances blood flow throughout your system. That enhanced flow helps you quickly relax. Your panic will subside and you will be able to think clearly again. Use this deep-breathing technique for networking events or whenever you present in front of others.

“Thoughtful Follow-Up”

Extroverts have their own methods for networking. Introverts can learn by observing, and often, doing the exact opposite. “Extroverts dazzle with light banter; introverts impress with thoughtful follow-up.”

“Contrary to urban legend, introverts are as likely as extroverts to be effervescent, exuberant and quick-witted.”

Extroverts’ methods include:

- **“Jump on in”** – Extroverts love this tactic. They feel at ease introducing themselves to a room full of strangers and taking over the conversation. Introverts do not. Introverts feel comfortable observing and learning from others. Use this facility at your next social function. Pay close attention to those near you. Listen to what they are saying. You’ll be able to use this information during the evening to start meaningful conversations.
- **“Sell yourself”** – Extroverts showcase and promote themselves. Introverts do not. Instead of talking about yourself, as many extroverts do, ask intelligent questions to get other people to talk to you.
- **“Maximize time with others”** – Extroverts enjoy the company of others and will go out of their way to socialize. Introverts are content with their own

company. Respect this predisposition as you plan your social calendar. Include networking events, but on a selective basis. Network in palatable doses so you do not become overwhelmed.

Relaxation Techniques

Introverts can use other techniques to network more effectively. For example, preregistering at a networking event can make it much more manageable. Preregistration will allow you to receive a preprinted nametag and to avoid the awkward moments spent making your own. If you're facing an evening affair, stop work early to decompress beforehand. Ask a friend to accompany you and arrive early.

“Unscheduled spontaneous social time is not ideal for most introverts.”

Take a moment before entering the affair for a quick look in a mirror. You always want to look your best. Joining in a line can be a good way to jump-start a conversation because you can talk to the people in front of you or behind you. Maintain a friendly, open demeanor. Don't worry about yourself. Focus on the other people in the room. Get them to open up and speak about themselves. Employ periodic rest stops – that is, slip away from everyone else and recharge. Make sure to have a viable “departure plan” so that you easily can leave when you wish.

Networking's “Platinum Rule”

The Platinum Rule for successful networking is: “Treat others how they want to be treated.” You must become sensitive to other people's preferences or conversational styles. Sleuth out what the other individuals are like and what makes them feel most comfortable. Be sufficiently flexible to adapt yourself accordingly, even if that calls for “behaving out of type.” Move outside yourself: Become more attuned and responsive to putting other people at ease socially, and then adjusting your behavior and mood to match those around you. The concentration this exercise requires will help you think less about yourself and your own responses during the event. You will become much more comfortable.

“Clear Format and Purpose”

Although you may dislike networking, you can find social activities where you will feel comfortable. These events can turn out to be excellent networking opportunities. In most cases, people who dislike networking, per se, actually enjoy other social activities “with a clear format and purpose” – for example, lecture series, professional development seminars, classes, nonprofit boards, and so on. Networking often occurs at such events.

“Place a new frame on objective reality [to] dramatically change your understanding of events and people.”

Make a list of the types of social activities you enjoy. Write what you like about them. Now think about similar activities you might enjoy that present networking possibilities. Have a definite outcome in mind for any new networking events you attend in the future. For example, if you are an electrical engineer, “locate a local association for electrical engineers. Volunteer for an event, and if it's a good fit, consider joining the board of directors.”

Smile – and the World Smiles With You

One of the best – and easiest – ways to become popular at networking events is simply to smile. Make smiling your “number one networking tool.” When you smile, you exude confidence. Smiling provides numerous benefits for anyone at networking events, not just introverts. Because smiling is a nonverbal gesture, you don't have to start talking to strangers. Some people think that introverts are standoffish. Put a smile on your face, and they will know better. A smile is an open invitation for others to gravitate toward you. Smiling naturally makes you feel better about yourself since “emotions follow actions.”

“We do not succeed by denying our natural temperaments; we succeed by working with our strengths.”

Do you feel uncomfortable with this suggestion? Do you think that putting a smile on your face will make you look like a phony? Maybe you are not “the smiley type.” Even so, having a smile can truly make all the difference any networking event. It “has a higher payback and lower cost than any other accessory under the sun.”

Be Prepared

The more prepared you are for a networking event, the better you will feel about it, and the more effective you will be at making connections. At any event, you must be ready to speak about yourself. In advance of an event, develop a list of professional information about yourself, and some personal information you don't mind sharing. Once your list is complete, fill in the facts for each nugget of information. Make sure that your items are: “short, positive, personal, easy to explain” and “interesting without bragging.” Seek “opportunities to discover mutual connection.”

“Quality networking is about connecting.”

For your professional information, plan to discuss what you do and where you work, what you like about your job, a professional achievement and a work goal that you hope to attain. For your personal information, be ready to talk about your interests, activities and hobbies, where you are from, something that makes you proud, information about your family and a personal goal that you want to accomplish. Once you have this information down on paper, practice saying it out loud, over and over, with a family member or friend. This way, the information will sound completely natural to you when you say it to strangers.

Planning an “Introvert-Friendly” Event

How can you make a networking event introvert-friendly? First, don't let the extroverts in your group take over the brainstorming and initial planning sessions. And they will if you let them. Provide notepads and pens, and ask everyone to write down their ideas. This will produce good input and you won't risk losing control of the gathering. If you let everyone speak their minds, the primary input will be from the extroverts.

“Do not waste a single precious hour on an activity you hate!”

To set up an engaging networking event, provide descriptive place cards for each person’s place setting – for example, “speaks three-plus languages,” “plays golf” or “PhD.” These help to break the ice. Put pens with different-colored inks near the nametags. Ask everyone to draw something symbolic about themselves on their nametags as a conversation starter.

“If there is no wind, row.” – Latin proverb

As an introvert, set firm, specific, positive networking goals, like “I will attend at least two networking events in the next six months.” Make sure your goals are under your scheduling control. Make them “challenging yet achievable.” Ensure that your goals coordinate well with your other activities. Include some way to measure your performance. Plan each of the first steps you need to take to achieve your networking goals.

About the Author

Devora Zack is the president of Only Connect Consulting.
