

Ten Ways to Improve Your Networking
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March 23, 2005

Networking is about laying the groundwork for a long-lasting friendship that would enable both of you to benefit from each other's good fortune.

1. **Find Meaning in Every Conversation** – It's not how long the conversation lasts; it's how good it is. The most important connections are made within a short span. The conversation must have substance and focus. Don't waste the opportunity.
2. **Don't Network Just to Network** – Have a goal, a strategy. You must have something to give. If it's all about you, it's a lost opportunity. Good networkers recognize that your value as an effective networker depends on your ability to ensure that the people you meet believe they have a stake in your success as much as you have a stake in their success. You can achieve this by engaging in **meaningful conversation**.

Three types of contacts:

- a) **Hello – Goodbye**: People you meet along the way. It may take five or more years.
 - b) **Important Contact Follow Up**: People that are of value.
 - c) **Aspirational Contacts**: People you would like to meet – Lee Scott of Wal-mart, Andy Taylor of Enterprise Rent-a-Car, August Busch IV of Anheuser Busch, Pat Mulcahey of energizer, President of Nigeria, Bob Costas, Russ Mitchell of CBS, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Jack Welch of General Electric, Jim Collins of *Good to Great*, Oprah Winfrey, Governor Blunt of Missouri.
3. **Don't Be a Pest** – Don't spam out hello's or how are you doing notes; you can kill a good friendship with unnecessary emails. Banish the idea from your thoughts that it is important that you email them every week. Touch base only when you have something important to share. An occasional seasonal card or updates on developments in your career could be of interest, **but don't overdo it**.
 4. **Dependability is the Currency of Your Credibility** – Make few promises and keep them all. Don't come across as a do it all, know it all. **Relationships take time**, so exercise the virtue of constructive impatience.

√ Where to network:

- Political fundraisers
- Conferences
- Non-for-profit boards
- Any airplane's first class cabin
- PTA meetings
- Soccer league
- Basketball league
- Church
- At your friendly neighborhood Starbucks

√What to read

- Newspapers that connect you to what's going on
- Bizjournal – St. Louis
- Post Dispatch
- Ladue News
- St. Louis American

5. **Whatever You do Please Don't Park** – Don't get involved in a conversation to the point that you can't stop and move on. The essence of networking is to have a short meaningful conversation that "whets" the appetite of both of you so that there is a justification to want to continue the conversation in the future. Also watch for body movements, if the person you are talking to begins to look beyond you or loses eye contact with you is attempting to get the attention of others, **it's time to move on**. Don't feel compelled to force the discussion where there is no more to say, move on. Have the sensitivity that you are not the only person they want to talk to, so keep it short and meaningful.
6. **Have the Right Attitudes, and a Realistic Set of Goals** – Keith Ferrazzi in the book *Never Eat Alone*, a great handbook about how to use networking to achieve your goals, wrote about "**the networking jerk**." People who are always collecting business cards **for their rolodex**. The true networkers are genuine and are looking for **real friendships** and **exercise generosity**, often giving before they expect to receive, and occasionally making a request. Remember, making friends is only part of the equation. Asking them to help you to achieve specific goals is the other half. Categorize your business cards based on sections, areas of interest, a list by cities, corporations.
7. **Always Follow Up, but Have Something of Value to Say** – When you meet people for the first time, make sure you debrief after your conversation. Note on the back of their business card interesting **tidbits** and **valuable information** picked up during your discussion. For example, note what **name they prefer, the date and location of the first meeting** and capture as much about the discussion as you can recall. This is important, so, when you follow up, there will be a basis to continue the discussion on a familiar level. Remember, you need to be **interesting**.
8. **It's Not Who You Know but Who Knows You** – Remember the goal of networking is not to meet as many people as possible. You need to remember who you are. Be yourself. The purpose is to meet as many people as you can manage, determine their value and to ensure that they know you well enough to return your calls. It's that simple.
9. **Maintain Your Originality** – We were all born originals but most of us spend the rest of our lives trying to be copies. It's your originality that will set you apart. If you look and sound and act like everybody else, then you don't really exist.
10. **Leave a Positive Lasting Impression** – After I meet people for the very first time, I always think about what kind of impression did I leave behind. Will they think of me as a jerk, someone they would like to work with, a friend to check up on now and then or a source of information? Leave with a positive impression.