

## Seven Smart Networking Moves Guaranteed To Make You More Memorable

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It's a fact: employers prefer to hire people they know over "mystery" candidates. That's why networking accounts for how 64 percent of people find jobs, while only 11 percent find work through advertisements (New York Times survey, 2002). Conferences, trade shows, meetings, and small-group gatherings are excellent venues for being visible, getting connected, and becoming known to the people who have the power to hire. Here are seven "C's" for making the most of networking events.

1. **Catalog your strengths, value, and vision.** Know who you are and what you want. What are your greatest strengths? Convert those strengths into value. Think in terms of return-on-investment (ROI) -- how would you describe your ROI were an employer to ask, "What can you do for us?" Finally, envision. As Stephen Covey says, "Begin with the end in mind." What opportunities are you targeting? What skills do you want to use that would tap into your tingle factor?
2. **Create your marketing theme.** Using three key strengths from No. 1 above, compose a short verbal business card. Here's an example: "As a sales rep for hotel properties, I specialize in the 3 R's: Research, Relationships, and Revenue Growth. My research skills helped unearth a list of 40 qualified prospects. My relationship skills opened the doors to meet decision-makers and match the benefits of our property with their needs. The result is that revenue grew more than 30 percent over the past 12 months, at a time when most properties' revenues were stagnant or declining."
3. **Chart your course.** Literally. If you're attending a large convention or trade show, do some logistical planning to cover all the ground efficiently. Review the list of attendees to identify whom you want to meet and when and where you might call on them. Ask colleagues their recommendations for whom you should consider meeting. If time permits, do a quick Google.com search on your target contacts so you'll have some personalized dialogue once you've completed the perfunctory pleasantries. In some cases, it may be appropriate to email or phone your contacts in advance of the event. Mention that you'll be attending and, at the suggestion of so-and-so (e.g., a known and trusted colleague of the contact), are looking forward to saying a brief hello.
4. **Connect with people.** Measure your networking success by the number of meaningful conversations you've had, not by the number of business cards you've handed out or collected. The fastest way to have a meaningful conversation is to put aside your personal agenda for finding a job and focus on the other person. How? Smile, look people in the eye, and care about them by asking questions, such as "What's the most interesting exhibit (or, seminar, idea, project] you've seen here?" Or, "Who would you like to meet here?" (you may know someone who could help make the connection). Or, "What do you hope to accomplish at this event?"
5. **Clarify needs.** Clarify your contact's needs so you can understand how you can be of value. Arm yourself with intelligent questions: "What important projects are gathering dust in your in-box? What interesting projects are you working on now and where might you need help? What changes or challenges do you see in the next 6-12 months at your company, and what will those changes bring? What resources or ideas are you looking for at this meeting/event?" Notice that you're not asking whether there are any job openings available!
6. **Collaborate on needs.** Position yourself as the answer to those needs. For instance, "In my most recent position, we had a similar problem. What have you tried so far? We found that XYZ

system worked well in our situation." Or, "are you aware of such-and-such a resource?"

7. **Continue the connection.** Look for appropriate opportunities to ask for a business card or gain permission to make contact again soon. For instance, if your contact is checking her watch or looking distracted, you might say, "I don't want to take up too much of your time just now. Perhaps we can continue our conversation after the conference/meeting. When would it be convenient to touch base with you again?" Or, "I recently read a fascinating article about that subject. I'd be happy to email you the link if you've got a business card handy." Or, "I know someone who may be a good connection for you. I can email you their contact info." Or, "Who else should we include in our next conversation?" Or, "Who else would you recommend I speak with about that?" As a creative way of following up with contacts, one bright job-seeker carried a camera with her, took photos of her target company's exhibit booth (with their permission) and offered to email a digital photo later.

Carve out some post-meeting/conference time on your calendar for follow-up with personalized emails or phone calls. Commit to keeping these new relationships alive in the months ahead. When the right opportunity opens up at your dream company, you'll find yourself on the short-list, head and shoulders above the mystery candidates!

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