

Networking 101 for Introverts: 10 Tips to Help you Connect with Confidence

Every business leader needs to network to build relationships, gain industry knowledge or find new employees and vendors.

Plenty of tips exist to help extroverts get the most out of corporate and social events. But what if you're an introvert?

Networking seems to happen almost effortlessly for those who enjoy meeting people and are born with the gift of gab. That's not typically the case for introverts, however, who often find busy, loud social situations suffocating and awkward.

How can introverts get the most out of their professional opportunities? Read on.

Psych yourself into success

The first order of business is to remind yourself that you're not the only person in the room who's feeling awkward. You're not necessarily shy or uninterested in people. You're reflective rather than boisterous. Remember, those big, extroverted personalities need an audience and you, the introvert, make an excellent foil.

Here are 10 tips to play into your strengths as an introvert and reduce the anxiety of attending business events:

1. Know your purpose

Some events are simply required, such as when your company sponsors an industry event or the CEO asks you to represent the business at a conference. But in the case of other networking events, be sure you know the purpose behind your attendance. Do you need to find a new client or put out the word that your company is hiring? Knowing your purpose brings focus to the rest of your preparation and helps reduce anxiety.

2. Make a plan

If you have a hard time coming up with conversation starters, plan a few in advance. I like to ask people, "Where were you born?" It's not the typical question, and most people like to talk about where they're from. You can also build your conversation starters around your purpose, such as, "I'm looking to hire 25 new salespeople. Do you know someone here I should speak with?"

3. Bring a wing man

If you dread walking into the room alone, bring a friend or colleague for support. It's a time-honored way to improve your comfort level. You can even bring a new coworker so that your "job" at the event is to introduce them.

4. Arrive early

If you can't bring a colleague for support, be sure to arrive early, before conversational groups have formed. This allows you to join the event when everyone in the room is looking for someone to speak with.

5. Prepare your elevator speech

You're at a business event, so be prepared with a succinct answer for the inevitable question, "What do you do?" Create a short, but interesting, sentence that tells people what you do rather than simply stating your title. That's why I tell people, "I'm a human capital forensics specialist" instead of an HR performance specialist.

6. Use the rule of two

Rather than going into a room and collecting 25 new business cards, go with the intent of having a genuine conversation with two people. That's it. Just two people you didn't know before. Set yourself this small, but meaningful, goal and give yourself permission to leave once it's accomplished.

7. Volunteer to work the event

Professional groups almost always need someone to man the registration table, hand out program materials and other tasks. By volunteering to help, you automatically get introduced to others and have a role to fulfill.

8. Look for other introverts

One of the handiest ways to psych yourself out of your introversion is to look out for fellow introverts. If you see someone standing at the edge of the room, or hovering around the nibbles table, introduce yourself with a "Don't you just hate these events?" You're sure to gain a friend.

9. Don't fret over awkward moments

Introverts tend to feel crushed by a conversational misstep. But remember, everyone feels uncomfortable at times and everyone makes the occasional social mistake. It also helps to prepare for common awkward moments, such as how to extract yourself from the nonstop talker. The book *Networking for People Who Hate Networking* by Davora Zack is filled with step-by-step tips to help even the most introverted get comfortable with the business necessity called networking.

10. Create your own events

One surefire way to be comfortable at an event is to create your own. Schedule a small group of people you'd like to know better in a quiet space where you can really talk, such as a coffee shop or lunch spot. By picking the participants and the venue, you're able to control the environment and make it conducive to your strengths.

Overall, avoid the extrovert's playbook. Instead, depend on your strengths as an introvert: Listen deeply and be thoughtful in your conversations. By knowing your strengths and planning your attack, even the most reserved of introverts can conquer business networking.

Monych, B. (n.d.) *Networking 101 for introverts: 10 tips to help you connect with confidence.*

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For more information contact us at careercenter@indianatech.edu or call 260.422.5561 ext. 2217.