

Networking Like a Pro

Three easy questions to help you stand out; simple ways to make a lasting impression.



Question: Generally speaking, during most conversations, people like to talk more about:

a) themselves, or b) other people.

Answer: Themselves

Question: Generally speaking, during most conversations, people:

a) tend to talk more than they listen, or b) tend to listen more than they talk.

Answer: Tend to talk more than they listen

Extra credit: If at networking events you're listening while they're talking, and then you ask a good follow-up question based on the information you just heard, are you going to be less or more likely to stand out in their minds?

Answer: More likely!

And if we know that networking is less about meeting new people than having them remember you, then keeping these techniques in mind is a great first step in helping you stand out from the crowd.

So, how do you get someone to remember you from the other ten people h/she met that very same night? One great communication technique is a term called focused attention, consisting of these two effective listening skills: attention and reflection.

Attentive listening includes eye contact, posture, facial expressions, gestures and genuine interest in what the person is saying.

Reflection includes repeating and paraphrasing what you have heard, showing the person that you truly understand what has been said.

Another great way to stand out from the crowd is to ask the right questions of people when you're talking to them. Here are some examples:

“Where else do you normally network?”

Amy Windham, a sales and marketing colleague of mine in Atlanta, first brought this one to my attention and it's an absolute gem. Not only does it help break the ice during that sometimes-awkward period just after you've introduced yourself, but it also gives you a chance to talk about something you both know a little bit about.

Another reason I like this question so much is that it gives you the opportunity to make an “instant connection” with that other person.

How? By providing valuable information they might not have had before. And as we all know, one of the keys to creating a solid business contact is to first make a connection with that individual.

As an example of this, I was at a networking event one morning when I asked the person where else he normally networked. He told me that, as a matter of fact, he didn't know of too many other places around town because he just moved to the area.

Well that was music to my ears, because as a person who's lived in Atlanta for almost five years, I like consider myself somewhat of an expert when it comes to local networking events. So I gave him the names of a couple of groups off the top of my head, and I mentioned that I would shoot him an email when I thought of some more.

You could almost see the relief in his eyes. He was genuinely grateful that I was helping him out with that information.

And that's what I mean when I talk about creating a connection with someone and developing a solid business contact. If that were you, would you remember me after that event? You bet.

“So, what do you like best about what you do?”

This is another good question I like to ask early on in the conversation because, in my opinion, it's a little fresher approach to the old, “So what do you do?” Everyone's been asked that one before, and this question gives you another option for getting that same information.

One caveat, though: About 40% of the time I ask this question, people turn it right around and ask me the same thing. So don't say I didn't warn you!

“Oh, I see. What got you started in that direction?”

This is a great question to ask during the latter stages of the conversation, and of the three questions we've talked about, this will usually elicit the longest response.

And that's good too because now we're getting ready to wind down our conversation, but not before we get a chance to learn a little bit about what motivates this person, and how he got where he is today.