CUP OF COFFEE
TIP SHEETS

13 TIPS FOR BECOMING A NETWORKING ROCKSTAR

Does this sound familiar? You're attending a conference. There's a pre-event cocktail reception on the agenda. When you arrive, everyone already seems to be broken up into little social groups… and no one acknowledges you or makes eye contact when you walk into the room. It's a miserable feeling.

But don't fret. Remember, you're not alone. Nearly *everyone* in the room feels the same way. So, put away that fear and anxiety… and embrace the recommendations below for maximizing your time in these situations.

BEFORE THE EVENT

1. **Business cards.** Make sure you have plenty of business cards to take with you… running out of them is simply not an option!

2. **Your pitch.** Create and practice your basic 4-step elevator pitch ('winging it' is not allowed!):
    1. Who you are and who you work for.
    2. What your firm does.
    3. Your target audience and – as importantly – the problems that you solve for them.
    4. What makes your firm unique! This is difficult – which is why almost no one does it – but it's also the most memorable aspect of the pitch.

3. **Clothing.** Consider wearing a shirt or blouse with your company logo on it – either embroidered or as a company pin. You never know who might see it and start a conversation.

4. **Set appointments.** A couple of weeks out, if you know of any key clients or prospects who will be there, reach out to them to make sure you connect at the event. And even if you've never met them in-person before… the setting makes meeting for the first time very easy.

DURING THE EVENT

5. **No interruptions.** Put away your cell phone and turn off the sound! C'mon… you can live without it for an hour or two.

6. **Set a goal for networking.** That is, how many new contacts do you want to make during a 3-day conference? Then go make it happen.

7. **It's not about you... it's about them (#1).** Follow the 20/80 rule – talk for 20% of the time/ listen for 80%; that means asking good, insightful questions. Then "listen with your eyes."

8. **Break the ice.** Because *everyone* there is feeling a little anxious like you, sometimes you'll have to be the one to break the ice; try these 3 tips…
    - If you see someone you *do* know, get them to introduce you to whomever they're talking to.
    - Be bold (#1)… if you see a group of 3-4 people chatting, just walk up and stand next to them; someone there will *always* reach out and bring you in to the conversation.

- Be bold (#2)… if you see someone standing alone, just walk up to them, introduce yourself and be prepared with an engaging question like, *"So, Mary, what brings you to the conference this year?"* Then you're off and running.

9. Visit the exhibits. Don't be afraid of networking with the vendors in the exhibit hall. The latest tools and technologies come from these companies – and your conversations might open the gateway to developing new services at your firm.

10. It's not about you... it's about them (#2). Want to really make an impression? Before you 'disconnect' with someone, ask them, *"How can I help you?"* Wow! Who does that?

11. Conversation tips:

- The #1 things that people like to hear is the sound of their own name, so use it often in conversation.
- The #1 thing people like to talk about is themselves… so ask a lot of questions and allow that to happen.

12. My personal secret… take notes. After chatting with someone and swapping business cards, most people stick the card in their pocket and move on. And after meeting with 30 or 40 people over 2 or 3 days, there's no way you'll remember *all* of the conversations (let alone *any* of the details) – unless you take notes. Do this… take a 3"x5" notepad with you and write down detailed notes after each conversation – the kind of firm, what you talked about, challenges they mentioned, any 'personal connection' (e.g. you went to the same college), next steps, etc. Now you have everything you need for effective follow-up (see #13 below).

AFTER THE EVENT

13. And the #1 thing most people WON'T do… follow-up. As soon as you get back to the office, make sure all of the business card data is entered into your CRM system. Then, go back to your notepad (see #12 above). Divide the contacts into hot/warm/cool leads and schedule the appropriate follow-up. The notes you took allow your follow-up actions to be customized to each individual based on the conversations you had… much more effective than a generic "nice meeting you" note. Also, remember to invite all your new contacts to connect on LinkedIn.

Conclusion: We all grew up being told, "Don't talk to strangers." Well, this is one time when your mother was wrong. Pick the right events, grab a bunch of business cards, commit to engaging with others… then go get 'em. It's really not as difficult as you think. And you'll make your momma proud!

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