

12 Steps for Networking Event Success

PLUS: A master networking tip
from a master networker, and the
worst networker I have ever met

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My first networking event was a complete failure. My biggest mistake? Unrealistic expectations.

These days, I see people making the same mistakes I made – and more. Even if you’re a networking veteran, you’ll find these ideas worth considering.

1. Choose events wisely

Whether or not it’s a good event is hard to know until you go at least once. Your local Chamber probably holds a regular event, but there are many other events that require a little digging.

Check your local newspaper – especially a local business journal – or ask around and see what you uncover. Obviously, look for events that may have some natural connection with the product or service you offer. You may even find a website listing regional networking events.

Don’t go back to events where most attendees have what I call a seller’s mentality. These people couldn’t care less about what you do. They only care about making sales. Making sales is important, but taking the time to build mutually beneficial relationships is better.

2. Call ahead

Here’s what I hear the most from newcomers at an event: “I didn’t know what to expect.” There’s no excuse for that. You should know the format of the event, how many people typically show up, and whether you can bring your marketing

material to either hand out or place on a table. A two-minute phone call to the event organizer will get you the answers you need.

3. Prepare your promo

Some events have attendees sitting around a table taking turns giving a 60-second promo for their business. Other events let you mingle the whole time. Either way, be able to clearly and quickly outline what you do and the benefits.

A mistake I see often is people who either can’t come up with 60-seconds or who can’t stop talking after 60-seconds. The former is due to bad planning. So is the latter, but it’s also disrespectful to others in the group. Don’t be remembered for the wrong reasons.

4. Dress for success

I’m going to assume you know how to dress professionally. And since you called ahead, you know if the event is business casual or a bit more formal.

But don’t forget to wear any of your association pins or emblems. Something like a Rotary pin can help you connect with someone who is either a fellow Rotarian or interested in hearing about Rotary. That helps you develop a stronger bond. Give someone a reason to connect with you at a deeper level.

At this point, you haven't even arrived at the event, yet these four steps will put you far ahead of a lot of other new people who show up without any planning.

5. Have your cards ready

It's always interesting to me how, at a networking event, some people have to fish around for a business card like they're shocked someone asked for one. Part of networking is exchanging cards, so be ready. And, please, make sure the cards you hand out are clean.

True story... A businessman was handing me his card, but we both noticed that the card had something on it. I thought it might be food. As he scratched the unknown substance off and handed the card to me he said, and I am not making this up, "*Must be a booger.*" Uh... OK.

One other thing... look at the back of any card given to you. If nothing is there, fine. But the best networkers don't waste the backside of a card. Sometimes that backside information does a great job of summarizing what the business is all about. If it's blank, jot down some notes from your conversation so you can recall important things you learned about that person and their business. (See step 8)

6. Arrive early

You may feel silly being the first one at the event other than the organizers, but I've found it's the best way to get quality time with one or two people without distractions. Even talking with the organizers can be valuable since they know their event best.

When the next attendee comes in, don't be shy. Welcome them just as you would if you were the host. Don't worry about telling

that person about yourself... that will come out in good time. Focus on them, memorize their name and find out how you can help that person. When the next person comes in, be the one to start the introductions.

7. Show interest

Don't be what I call a drive-by networker. You know the type. They want to hand you their card, exchange some quick pleasantries, and then hit the next person.

While getting business cards into as many hands as possible is a good goal, this drive-by technique typically paints the person as someone who is only interested in himself or herself. Take the time to get to know the person receiving your card.

8. Take notes

I rarely see anyone do this. Imagine what it would feel like if someone thought what you were saying was so important that they took notes.

Wouldn't that feel fantastic? Wouldn't you tend to remember that person? And wouldn't it be even better if that person took the time to ask you how they might be on the lookout for a good client for you? Of course! Now... be that person!

9. Stay late

This goes along with step 6. Don't be in a rush to leave. Post-event can be a prime time to solidify any connections you made.

Show some interest and ask your new acquaintances if they made any good contacts. See what they thought of the event

and use that to help you with step 12.

If it seems like you made a good connection with someone, try to schedule an appointment so the two of you can talk more. The networking doesn't have to end just because the event is over.

(As part of this step, please download my free guide, *Here's a Novel Idea: Connect With Your Connections*, for great tips on how to make a deeper and more meaningful connections with people in your network. You can get it, and other free resources, at <http://www.mikeklassen.com/resources>.)

10. Have realistic expectations

Remember when I mentioned having unrealistic expectations after my first networking event? I went back to my studio thinking that everyone I talked to would be calling me to become a client. After all, I just told people how I could help them make money with their marketing material. Who could resist that?

Turns out, everyone could! No one called and I shouldn't have been surprised. But I was a networking beginner, so what did I know?

However, that's what I see most often these days... people attending an event for the first time, not getting any business, then giving up and never going back.

If the event really doesn't fit with your mission, it's OK not to go back. But keep this in mind: People like to do business with people they know. They can't get to know you if you only show up once or twice.

11. Follow-up

One year, I attended ten of my Chamber's twelve monthly networking events and talked to about 25 people each time. Can you guess how many times someone I talked to at those events followed-up with me to make a pitch? Twice.

If you have names and numbers from a networking event, it won't surprise those people if you contact them. Yes, they might not want to talk, but you never know until you call.

12. Re-evaluate

I continually see people attend events that do nothing for them. There's often a fear that if you stop attending, you might miss out on some business.

Don't make that mistake. If the attendees or represented businesses aren't a good match for your business, cut your losses and allocate that time to better events or other types of marketing.

So that's it... 12 steps to make networking events successful. There are more than these 12 steps, but these steps are a great start.

Even putting a few of these ideas to work will be a benefit to you. Putting all 12 in action will be even better.

A Master Networking Tip from a Master Networker

You may not know Dr. Ivan Misner by name, although you're probably aware of his creation: *Business Network International*, also known as BNI.

If there's anyone who knows how to master networking, it's Dr.

Misner. I was reminded of this as I read an article in *Networking Times* magazine some years back.

Networking Times is primarily focused on network marketers. However, I've found that most of the articles in each issue are easily applied to any business.

Dr. Misner talked about getting a professionally-made name badge that you can wear at networking events so it's easy for people to see your name and business name, and acting like a host at networking events, not a guest.

As I was thinking about that article, I remembered a conference call I was on where Dr. Misner was a guest. With a relatively small number of people taking part in the call, we each had a chance to ask Dr. Misner a question. While I can't recall what I asked, I do remember a brilliant piece of advice he gave.

Do the Splits

He referred to this technique as the splits. And I'd like to quote him from an article he wrote [here](#):

“As you see groups of two or three, notice if they are “open” twos and threes or “closed” twos and threes. The open twos and threes will have a gap between the individuals, almost inviting another person to join with them. The closed twos and threes will be completely self-absorbed and wouldn't be the first place to start practicing the splits. If you feel uncomfortable doing the splits on your own, ask the person hosting the event, or perhaps the individual who invited you to attend, to come around with you and introduce you to clusters of people.”

That's brilliant advice because it gives you a plan when

approaching people in new environment. It's even more brilliant if you consider yourself the shy type and not sure where to start in a room full of people you don't know.

By the way, it's a bit harsh but I'll say it any way: At a networking event, nobody cares if you're shy. Either get over it on your own, or join a group like Toastmasters to help you speak with confidence.

I've run into so many people at networking events and seminars who are really shy. In fact, it's the only thing they're *not* shy about... telling other people how shy they are. I'm obviously not a psychologist, but these folks seem to take a bit of comfort in letting other people know how shy they are. However, it really doesn't serve you.

I don't consider myself either shy or out-going. But I knew early on that if I was going to make any progress in networking and as a freelancer, I was going to have to get over any issues I might have facing groups of people I didn't know. In some cases, I've faked it... I pretended to be more out-going than I really was. Nobody knew, nobody cared.

For a time, I was a Chamber Ambassador where part of the job was to be a host at Chamber networking events. That was actually a big help to me... I had to be out-going since it was part of the job as an Ambassador. It's almost like an actor who has to take on a new personality as part of a role.

I'm not saying you should be a fake, insincere person. I'm saying you sometimes have to step a bit outside of yourself to achieve your goals. That might include playing some mental games with yourself so you're not focused on whatever fear you might have in new situations.

Hopefully, over time, those temporary qualities you adopt for these situations will become a real part of your everyday personality that benefits your business and the people you associate with.

The Worst Networker I Have Ever Met

Networking is a topic almost without end, but let me leave you with this true story...

You might think the worst networker is one who doesn't bother showing up at networking events. Nope. The worst networker is one who does show up, but leaves such a bad impression, he or she kills any chance of doing business with others in the group. At least the person who stays home has a chance of getting business through other means.

Years ago, my chamber had an evening mixer at a local ice cream shop. The mixer was for current chamber members and potential members. All the pieces were in place for a good event including free ice cream samples.

But one man actually managed to take this potential and do nothing with it. I don't recall his name (I'll call him Bob) or what he did, but no one forgot the impression he made.

I noticed him standing alone which, in a small store such as the one we were in, meant that he managed to be alone while being within about two feet of other people. Being a Chamber Ambassador, I walked over and said hello.

The first thing I noticed was that Bob didn't smile. In fact, he had a bit of scowl. How someone could be getting free ice cream and not smile is a mystery I'll never solve. We did the "What do you do?" dance and then he told me why he attended that night.

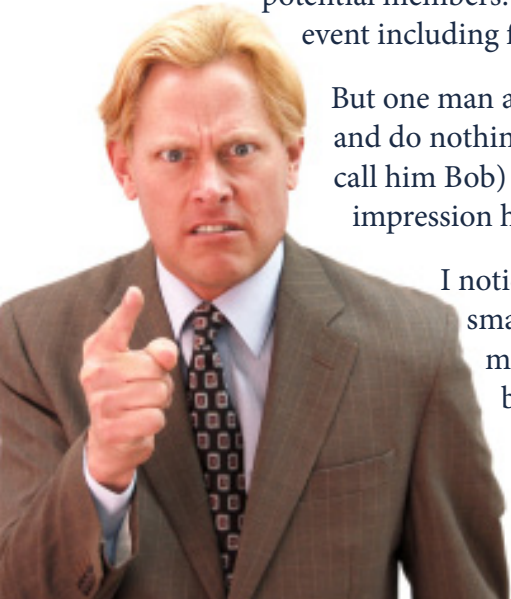
He was considering joining the chamber, but would base his decision on joining my chamber or another on how nice people were to him. He felt the best way to do that would be to stand off by himself and wait for people to come to him. I was tempted to tell him that, in my opinion, that's not the way you pick a chamber. But Bob actually seemed proud of his plan, so I left it alone.

The rest of the evening, Bob stood guard by the wall. I'd watch other people approach him, talk for a few minutes, then find a way to excuse themselves.

When the group got large enough to flow outside the shop, Bob was the topic of discussion. He had made a bad impression on everyone he met. Those he didn't meet had no desire to approach him after hearing a few stories. Certainly the thought of doing business with Bob was a non-starter. One person joked that the chamber might actually pay Bob *not* to join.

I don't know what you expect when you consider joining a group or when you attend a networking event. If you expect everyone else to do all the work for you, you'll be disappointed.

I'll assume you're not as bad as Bob in these situations, but do you expect to just show up, have everyone search you out and initiate the conversation? Networking takes effort and those who make the effort are rewarded. Those who don't have wasted an opportunity to build their business, and may actually hurt it... like Bob.



About Mike Klassen



Mike Klassen is a consultant, speaker, author and direct marketing graphic designer, helping businesses boost sales and create more personal connections with customers and prospects.

He speaks extensively about content marketing and content repurposing, showing how businesses can stand out from competitors while solidifying relationships with customers and prospects.

In his role as a direct marketing graphic designer, Mike works with clients to leverage their content through magalogs, books, sales letters and training material.

In addition to helping clients around the world, Mike works directly with businesses on the stage and in the classroom. His experience is shared in articles and advice that have appeared in *Print Professional Magazine*, *ESBJournal*, *Home Business Magazine*, and *Inside Freelance Design*.

He's also the host of the *Increase Sales & Build Deeper Connections Podcast* and co-host of the *Neanderthal Marketing Radio Show*, both available on iTunes.

Mike is the author of *Increase Sales & Build Deeper Connections: Maximizing Your Content to Boost Sales and Generate Better-Quality Leads*.

To learn more about Mike and how he can help you boost sales or speak to your group, visit: <http://mikeklassen.com>

[Mike's] presentation was a stand-out among our delegates. His content was well thought-out and he provided lots of examples and tips on how those listening could take immediate action on the points he had to share. What else I loved about Mike was the fact that he was extremely approachable and our members enjoyed lots of face-time with Mike as he helped them through various issues relating to Marketing and building their personal and business brand. We'd welcome him back anytime and would highly encourage any organisation to engage Mike wherever in the world they may happen to be.

Dale Beaumont

Author of 16 Best Selling Books

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