

# How to Avoid the 13 Biggest Networking Mistakes

While some are more naturally adept than others, anyone can learn how to use in-person networking as a way to find a job or advance a career. However, networking has to be done correctly for it to be enjoyable and effective. Here are 13 of the top mistakes people make when networking in-person:

**Mistake #1: Lack of preparation:** Have a few ice-breaker questions and ideas ready for every event you attend, and be aware of the latest news/trends about the industry related to the organization hosting the event. Research any featured speakers or other people who may be in attendance, and have a few specific questions/ideas prepared just for them. This is worth the time it will take!

**Mistake #2: Attending the wrong events:** While it's never a waste of time to meet new people, you

should be attending events that are primarily comprised of people you want to meet. Many people think networking is pointless because they are going to events that don't make sense for their goals!

**Mistake #3: Having unrealistic expectations:** Don't set your expectations too high, or you'll feel unnecessary pressure. Just focus on meeting new people and sharing ideas, not on getting a sale or job on the spot! Unrealistic expectations will sabotage your confidence and make it much more challenging to have relaxed conversations with your peers.

**Mistake #4: Only talking to people you already know:** While it is always beneficial to build on current

relationships, many nervous networkers cling to people they know because they are afraid to talk to "strangers." Aim to talk to at least 2 new people for every hour you are at an event. You may find that once you talk to 1-2 new people, you are excited to keep going! Perhaps some of the people you know at the event can provide introductions to those you do not know.

**Mistake #5: Eating or drinking at the event:** Too many things can go wrong if you eat or drink at the

event. For example, you could spill something on yourself, you could eat something that destroys your breath, or you could end up having too many alcoholic drinks. Unless you are at an event where it would be rude not to eat, just have a snack 1 hour before you arrive. You will then be more focused on meeting new people instead of hiding behind a crab cake!

**Mistake #6: Making a bad elevator pitch:** When asked what you do, you must have a prepared response that is concise, captivating, and clear. (My current line is "I help students and recent grads get their dream jobs"). You need to have a statement you can say in about 5 seconds that does not leave people confused and that has people saying "wow, that's interesting" or asking "wow, how do you do that?" If you are out of work, don't tell people you are "unemployed." (While you might be out of a job for reasons beyond your control, there is a stigma associated with the word.) Instead, have some sort of academic, volunteer, or part-time project that you can reference as your current work. Or, say something like "I am taking some time off to consider a career change. I'm at this event to learn more about \_\_\_\_\_."

**Mistake #7: Trying to sell something right away:** Nothing turns off people at a networking event faster than someone trying to peddle a product or service or someone walking around asking for jobs. Build relationships first. The job or the sale can only come after the relationship has been formed.

**Mistake #8: Being too controversial:** Certain topics are always off-limits at networking events, i.e. sex, religion, and politics. Don't talk about anything that could make people uncomfortable; just being at the event is already difficult enough for many!

**Mistake #9: Barging in on intimate conversations:** In general, you should only introduce yourself to people who are by themselves or people in groups of 3 or more; it can be challenging and rude to

interrupt 2 people in a private discussion. The exception is when 2 people are standing side to side and looking around, a sign that they are receptive to others coming over and saying hello.

**Mistake #10: Talking too much about yourself:** The best way to start a conversation is to get a person

to talk about him/herself by asking questions. 2 of my favorite questions to ask are:

a. How did you end up getting involved in the \_\_\_\_\_? (Fill in the name of the organization hosting the event.)

b. How did you get your start in the \_\_\_\_\_ industry? (Fill in the name of the industry connected to the event.)

**Mistake #11: Making a poor introduction:** It is essential that you smile when you meet someone, that

you give a quality handshake (not too weak or too suffocating), and that you look them right in the eye when you shake hands. Fail to do these 3 things, and people will not trust you or respect you. First impressions are VERY powerful.

**Mistake #12: Focusing on quantity over quality:** Networking is not about seeing how many business

cards you can collect in an evening; it's about having meaningful conversations with people. One meaningful conversation is better than 10 conversations with people who will never remember you.

**Mistake #13: Not following up correctly after the event:** The relationship begins at the event, but it is

built afterwards. The day after the event, consider everyone you met and identify the people you want to stay in touch with. Connect with them on LinkedIn.com, and take 1 additional step to build that relationship, whether it is through a follow-up phone call or through scheduling a lunch.

In general, most people lack confidence and competence at networking events due to poor preparation and due to unrealistic goals and expectations. Over 70% of jobs are filled through personal contacts and networking, but that only happens when you approach networking the right way!

More information is at this blog- (By Pete Leibman, President of *Idealize Enterprises*)

<http://careermuscles.wordpress.com>

