

10 WAYS TO CONNECT AT A NETWORKING EVENT



1. **Find an event that meets your needs.** There are many types of networking events, so consider your personal style, comfort level, and schedule (e.g., if you're typically drained at the end of your day, consider breakfast, lunch, or weekend opportunities).
2. **Know who's going to be there.** Before registering, confirm that the types of people you hope to connect with will be there (e.g., if you want to mingle with hiring managers, an event attended primarily by other job-seekers won't help you out). If a list of attendees isn't available in advance, consider arriving a bit early to look at the name tags set out on the registration table. Even recognizing the name of an organization can help you make a relevant connection.
3. **Prepare in advance.** Understand the event structure. Will there be a display table for you to set out flyers? Is there a place to drop off or post resumes? Are people expected to exchange business cards during introductions? Bring more supplies than you think you may need.
4. **Prioritize your goals.** Before leaving your home or office, know what you hope to accomplish. If you get an attendee (or exhibitor) list in advance, identify 3-5 people you hope to connect with; prepare relevant conversation starters for each contact and strategies to steer the conversation to your main purpose for the connection. Redefine success – a couple of meaningful conversations are typically better than randomly distributing a whole box of business cards.
5. **Go alone.** The purpose of a networking event is to expand your network; not to spend time with people you already know. If you're on your own, you can more effectively join other conversations and it's easier for others to initiate conversations with you. If you notice someone standing alone, s/he may be grateful for your company; introduce yourself and find something in common to talk about.
6. **Strategically position yourself.** Stand near the registration table or entrance to initiate conversations; as most people arrive alone, it's a great time to make connections. Similarly, strike up conversations at the food table (with the bonus effect that high endorphin levels boost memory, resulting in a better likelihood that your connection will be remembered).
7. **Talk with strangers.** Despite the warnings we give to children, it's okay to talk to strangers at networking events! As most people are attending to make new connections, it's quite normal and expected to approach people you don't yet know.
8. **Remember names.** During introductions, listen carefully to the names of the people you are connecting with; glancing at their nametag may help to reinforce what you've heard. If you're not sure of a name, don't hesitate to ask for it to be repeated. To remember names, try repeating the name in conversation or using mnemonic devices (e.g., caring Carla).
9. **Offer to help.** Consider playing a key role at a networking event (e.g., volunteering at the registration table, introducing speakers, coordinating the door prize, even speaking yourself). You'll be more visible, may meet leaders and key players, and may gain insider knowledge about the organization or industry.
10. **Follow-up.** If you've connected with someone, get his/her business card or contact information and make a note to follow-up. Ask if it's alright for you to send a helpful link regarding something you've been discussing. Use the back of his/her business card to jot down brief notes about your conversation or commitments.

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604.856.2386
info@lifestrategies.ca
www.lifestrategies.ca