

Tips for Maximizing Networking Opportunities

We all know how valuable networking can be for career advancement, for generating job or business leads and to learn about new opportunities, ideas or resources. Here are some tips for maximizing your next networking experience:

1. Look good, feel good. If you're going to an important event and are looking for a job (or a new opportunity or connection), dress professionally and appropriately. If this is a real challenge for you, consider hiring an image/wardrobe consultant. You only have one chance to make a first impression—how do you want to be perceived?
2. Prior to the event, consider setting an “intention” for what you want to receive from your networking experience. Connections/partnerships? New clients? Resources/ideas for a new project? Support from others who share similar values or goals? New friendships?
3. Think "how can I help others?" and show genuine interest in those you are meeting. Don't focus solely on how others can help you, but on how you can add value and offer resources/contacts to those you meet. I'm a firm believer that the more you give, the more you receive.
4. Be authentic. Be sincere. Be yourself. People can tell when you're not!
5. If you're currently unemployed, or are in the early stages of launching a new business, have some temporary business cards printed (Office Max charges \$15 for 250 cards). Also, don't forget to ask for business cards from the people you meet so you can follow-up.
6. Have a 20-second "elevator speech" prepared highlighting who you are and what you do. Use your own language; be succinct, energetic and confident! Remember, it's difficult for others to help you if they don't know who you are and what you do or need.
7. Go early, stay late. Often, some of the best, most relaxed times for meeting others are immediately before or after a lunch or dinner presentation or event.
8. If you make connections you want to cultivate, follow-up! Send an e-mail or initiate a lunch meeting, if appropriate. If you're meeting a lot of people, it often helps to make a notation on the back of the cards you collect to jog your memory.