

Five Stumbling Blocks To Successful Networking And How To Overcome Them

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The ability to connect with people is essential to success in any business. Professional networking events present opportunities to interact with others on a personal level and to develop profitable relationships. These occasions are critical for anyone who wants to grow a business or promote a career.

Many people are simply not comfortable walking into a room full of strangers and striking up conversations. Here are five common stumbling blocks that you may face and tips to help you overcome them.

A Reluctance To Talk To Strangers

You were taught at an early age not to speak to people you don't know. It's not safe. In certain situations today this is still good advice. In business, however, talking to strangers is a way to generate interest and support for your products and services. If you only talk to the people you already know, you will miss out on opportunities to make new connections and establish valuable contacts.

To get past your discomfort in talking to strangers, set a goal for yourself before you attend any networking event. Decide how many new contacts you want to make or how many strangers you want to meet. In some cases, you may specifically target individuals whom you'd like to know.

Next come up with some icebreakers or conversation starters. Have questions prepared that you can ask anyone you meet at the event. You may want to inquire about other people's business, their connection to the sponsoring organization or their opinion of the venue.

Lack Of A Formal Introduction

It's much easier to make a new contact when there is someone else to handle the introduction and pave the way. If you wait for another person to make the move you may not meet anyone. At networking events, the goal is to meet as many people as possible.

This is the time to take the bull by the horns, walk up to people you don't know, introduce yourself and start a conversation. You can do this if you have prepared your self-introduction in advance.

You will not introduce yourself the same way on every occasion.

Perhaps it is your first time to attend an association meeting.

In that case, you might want to say that as part of your introduction. Let people know who you are, why you are there and give them a reason to ask more about you.

Fear Of Being Seen As Pushy

You may think that you will turn people off if you are assertive and that if they want to talk to you, they will make the first move. If this is your line of thinking you will find yourself spending your time alone at the reception or meeting function and leaving without a single new connection. Being open, friendly and interested does not turn people off.

You will not come across as overly aggressive if you seek out the "approachable" people. These

are the ones who are standing alone or who are speaking in groups of three or more. Two people talking to each other are not approachable because they may be having a private conversation and you would be interrupting.

Thinking That Other People May Not Like You

There is always the risk that the other person is not interested in you and doesn't want to meet or talk to you. It happens. If that is the case, don't take it personally. Nothing ventured is nothing gained. When you get a cold shoulder, smile, move on and say to yourself, "Next?"

Having Your Intentions Misunderstood

Approaching someone of the opposite sex to begin a conversation may seem more like flirting than networking. This is more of an issue for women than men. Women have an equal place in the work arena and need to make professional connections the same as men do. Women in business can no longer afford to hold back when there is opportunity at hand.

Neither men nor women will have their motives misinterpreted if they present themselves professionally in their attire and if they keep the conversation focused on business issues or topics that are not personal or private.

Whatever your stumbling blocks, face them before the next networking event and devise a personal plan for getting past them. Once you do, you will find yourself connecting with confidence and courtesy on every occasion and the results will be reflected in your bottom line.

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