



Networking Tips

Stockton Women's Network has received permission from NAFE, the National Association of Female Executives, to reproduce these networking tips which recap simple, effective methods of networking.

Sophisticated networkers want to brush up on the tools that have become second nature to them, or want to learn tips that will make them even better networkers. New networkers seek the basics, and the reassurance that their first forays will pay off. There's something here for everyone.

We hope you enjoy it and wish you success in all your endeavors.

Networking Know-How

21 Proven Tips for Building and Maintaining Valuable Career Contacts

Building a Solid Foundation

1. Understand How It Works. This concept of networking is simple: It's planning and making contacts and sharing information for professional and personal gain. The key words in that definition are *planning* and *personal*. Networking has to be planned – it doesn't just happen, and quality networking happens only when supportive or friendly relationships, as well as business contacts, are built.

Networking is a 24-hour process that's about *giving as well as getting*. You can't expect to attend one network meeting every six months and get results. You must always be on the lookout for people you can include in your network, and whose networks you can join. Understand that you may not benefit immediately... It may take years to see results. Or it may bring a phone call right away.

2. Set Your Goals. Decide who you want in your network and how you will contact them. Some



people prefer making telephone calls to writing letters; others feel just the opposite way. Try doing what's most uncomfortable for you. After all, networking is about pushing yourself forward and learning new skills. How will your "networking rendezvous" take place? Over coffee, at lunch, at someone's place of business, or over the telephone? Maybe you concentrate on joining organizations and attending meetings.

3. Plan Your Strategy. Make lists of names. Go through your Rolodex and list the people with whom you haven't talked in six months. Perhaps you want to reconnect with people from more than a year ago; list them. And don't forget to make cold calls. Maybe you've read articles about "stars" in your profession or friends have told you about wonderful speakers or authors they've heard. Many of these people (sometimes well-known) could be included in your network. List them, too.

4. Take Action. Set a timetable to achieve your goals; perhaps you can aim for one cold call, one lunch and two reconnecting calls a week. Create a file or notebook to record who you've called and what the outcome or response was. Stick to your schedule and, to stay on track, read over your responses from time to time. You'll be surprised and encouraged by how many contacts you are making.

It helps to set aside a special networking time, such as 3 to 5 p.m. on Thursdays, if your work schedule allows. Quiet Sunday evenings at home can be times for telephone networking, often the only way to make long distance contacts. If you put yourself on a mental schedule, you're more likely to really make those contacts. When attending meetings, set goals to meet a certain number of people or leave with a certain number of business cards. Then, do it!

"Cold Call" Networking

If you find it difficult to attend a meeting without knowing anyone, here are some tips to make those first few dreaded minutes work for you by building your confidence, not eroding it.



5. Prepare. Before arriving at a meeting, find out as much as you can about the agenda and the group hosting the event. It's often a good idea to make contact with someone at group headquarters beforehand. Ask a question about the speaker or the length of the program, for example. This way you will have forged a connection and will have a friendly face to look for when you arrive.

6. Psyche Yourself Up.

Your attitude is your most important asset. Refocus your preoccupation with your own anxieties by thinking about the other attendees. Pretend you are about to host a party and concentrate on helping others have a good time. Don't think of the people at the event as a mass entity (you'll be overwhelmed) but as individuals whom you can meet one-on-one. Rehearse what you'll say.

7. Talk Small.

Have at least three "small talk" questions in mind that will serve as conversation openers. ("How did you find out about the meeting tonight?" or "What are you hoping to learn from the speaker's talk?") Ask open-ended questions that draw people out, then turn their answers into two-way conversations.

8. Seek Every Opportunity To Meet People.

Don't wait until you actually walk into the meeting room to begin networking. If you arrive at the meeting place by car and notice a group of women in the parking lot, take the opportunity to strike up a conversation. "Are you going to the women's network meeting? Did you run into traffic on the freeway?" *Whether you are in the elevator, the ladies room or waiting at the bar, start talking.*

9. Use Your Name Tag To Your Advantage.

Attach your name tag to your right lapel. This way, when you extend your hand to meet someone, the person's eye moves easily to your name tag. Make sure the name tag itself is not only easy to read but stands out.



When you meet someone new, use *her* name tag to establish common ground and strike up a conversation. Comments such as “My sister’s name is Eileen, too,” or “I went to high school in that town,” can do wonders for opening up the lines of communication.

10. Find Kindred Spirits. Making eye contact is one of the most crucial tools for successful mingling. When you are seeking out people to talk with, scan the reception area for eye contact and friendly smiles. A person who averts her eyes and turns her head will not be easily approachable.

Also, seek out people who are by themselves. Instead of going up to a group of five people gathered around the bar laughing, find someone on equal footing — standing alone, looking uncomfortable.

11. Seat Yourself Strategically. If seats are not assigned at the event you are attending, use this as an opportunity to meet new people. Do not approach a round table where eight people are seated and only one or two seats are left. The group will already be engaged in conversation and may not notice your arrival. But if you approach a table where few people are seated, you’ll find them eager (and grateful) to welcome you.

Maintaining Your Network

12. Be Organized. All your contacts won’t do you any good unless you organize them. Think about how all this information will be most helpful to you. Many people use a multiple-Rolodex system. The one on top of your desk is for current, frequently used contacts. A second business card file is for the names of people you want access to, but know you won’t be speaking with more often than once every couple of months or so. An optional third file can be for the “old-timers,” people you haven’t contacted in a year or more.

You can also organize your network on color-coded or alphabetized index cards, categorizing your contacts and keeping track of the calls you make to each. Give your network a checkup at least once a year. Weed out and reorganize your card files, Rolodexes and address books. Keep your list of current and active contacts close at hand. Don’t discard old contacts; you can



always reconnect with them.

Your contacts can open doors for you if you earn their respect by building mutually satisfying relationships. Remember, nobody likes a user -- or a loser. If you network while you're employed and are concerned about what you can give to, as well as get from people, your colleagues will consider you a winner -- and lend a helping hand when you're down.

Caring For Your Contacts

13. Foster a Giving Attitude. Call contacts every few months to say hello and to offer *your* help. For most people, a no-strings-attached phone call from a colleague will be a pleasant surprise--and genuine concern and support will pay off when you do need help.

14. Remember the "Little" Things. Send colleagues copies of newspaper and magazine articles that you think will interest them. Include a short handwritten note that can be as simple as "F.Y.I." or "Thought you'd like to read this." If the article relates to your mutual profession, this will raise your professional credibility because it shows that you keep abreast of industry happenings.

15. Enhance Your Connections. Put your contacts on the mailing list for your company's publication. You'll cement your connections and may even provide useful information. This could also lead to new business opportunities for your firm.

16. Broaden Your Scope. Refer executive recruiters to qualified people within your network if you aren't interested in certain jobs. Your contacts (and the recruiters) will appreciate--and remember--such generosity.

Practicing Network Etiquette

Possibly the most important tool for good networking is to make sure you observe network etiquette. Here are a few essentials to remember.



17. Always Respect Your Contacts' Names. Get an OK before you use a person's name as a referral to get to someone else.

18. Keep an Eye on the Clock. Make sure you call people at appropriate times that are convenient for them. If you're on the East Coast, don't forget about the three-hour time difference and call someone on the West Coast at 6 a.m. Don't wake someone at midnight just to "touch base".

19. Follow Through on Your Promises. If someone asks for a copy of an article you've mentioned, jot that request on the back of her business card and send her the article within the week. If you offer to give someone a phone number, make sure you get it to her.

20. Thank Everyone Who Helps You or Provides You with Leads. At any given meeting, you're bound to come away with at least three ideas or tips. Thank the people who offered them, with a one-minute phone call or a brief handwritten note, to let them know what their help meant to you.

It's wise to thank people for leads even if their suggestions don't pan out; your contacts will appreciate the follow-up.

**And Last
But Not
Least...**

21. Do Remember that Networking is a Challenge. Always push yourself. Approach new people at meetings and start a conversation — even if you're in a bad mood. Taking the initiative really does pay off. Whether you're a novice or an expert, you get only as much out of networking as you put into it!
