

The Tao of Networking Nets Great Results

I attend a variety of networking events and marvel at the basic and banal mistakes I see would-be networkers making. It's enough to make me want to write an article!

Networking is about meeting new people, letting them meet you, and prospecting for sales, jobs, contracts, clients and more. Ineffective networking tires you out and discourages you by its lack of productivity. Worse yet, on occasion, you can actually leave a bad impression with strangers. Beware the following networking mistakes.

Nine Mistakes Networkers Make

Bad networkers mumble!

A mumble is a speaking stumble. People mumble their name, their occupation and their titles all the time. Your name is irrelevant if we can't hear it. You've been saying your name all your life so you may be bored with it, yet we may only hear it once. State your name clearly, slowly and in a way that we can repeat and remember it. It's your lifeline to contact. Take care in stating it. (For an article on the importance of Names visit

[I'll never forget what's-his-name!](#)

Poor networkers don't emphasize the benefits, just the features of what they do.

Remarkably, too many salespeople still focus on the features of their products and services instead of the end-results. Customers buy benefits, solutions and outcomes. Speak their language by focusing on what you and your products or services can do for them, not just what it can do or how it does it. Example: It's about the *results* of your new sales device, not its bells and whistles. How does it increase or expedite sales and what is the resulting ROI to its users?

Monotonal delivery.

If you can't convey your qualifications, passion and your product or service's viability in 30 seconds you've lost. Use vocal variety, intonation and enthusiasm to speak confidently about yourself, your products and services. (Toastmasters, www.toastmasters.org, can help you improve your conversational voice.)

'Spiel' too long.

Networking is not speechmaking. You have a finite window of opportunity to introduce yourself and your offerings, and glean a few details about the person you're talking to, their needs and wants. You can't recite a datasheet, tell your life story or otherwise drone on. Keep it short and sweet!

Unfocused conversation.

Networking is a chance to demonstrate focus, drive and confidence. Aimless rambling is pointless, and suggests you're not a focused professional. Showcase your communication skills by expressing yourself succinctly and ask precise questions.

Leakage.

Is there an inconsistency between what you say and what you do? Your card may say one thing about you, your clothing suggests something else and the language and vocabulary you use further confounds strangers in getting a fix on who you are, what you are about and your competency level. Strive to send consistent messages verbally, non-verbally and in your collateral materials and correspondence. When everything works together, the sum is greater than its parts.

You don't mind your manners.

Bad networkers can't make small talk, don't show an ability to exchange pleasantries and interrupt others. Can you gracefully engage and disengage from conversations? Are your questions intrusive and your answers curt? Are you showing proper respect for the stranger you've just met? Or are you singing Opera? If so, your tune is familiar: It's "Me-Me-Me-Me-Me!"

Slinging Slang.

Many networkers profess to have excellent communication skills yet use slang or mispronounce big words when little words are better. Beware the use of contractions, excessive acronyms and name-dropping too. Don't tell us what you're gonna do! I would like to hear what you are going to do instead.

Disrespect the Tao of Networking.

Networkers who are obsequious to those they believe can help them, yet rude to those they believe can't help them, disrespect networking. I've had networkers disparage the last person they met while in conversation with me. I was afraid to let them go for fear of what they would next say about me! That's antithetical to the spirit of networking. One networker took my card and, in front of me, wrote the letter A on it, and boasted he was "putting me in his A list." Let's just say he was clearly the biggest A I met that night! Learn from the Japanese culture which respects the business card as an extension of the individual it represents. Don't write on it in front of others, read and react to it with proper respect, and yours will be similarly received.

26 Tips for Networking Success: Networking From A to Z

Arrive early for best results.

Be a good listener.

Clearly enunciate (your name, your words, your sentences...).

Don't interrupt.

Exude confidence in your communication and how you carry yourself.

Focus on your conversational partner (not those around him or her).

Gather information about your conversational partner from questions, observations.

Help your listener remember you by what you say and how you say it.

Inquire about them. It's all about them.

Jump-start conversations with questions, compliments or engaging statements.

Know how you can best help others.

Listen actively (through the use of using gestures, facial expressions, body language).

Make and keep eye contact.

Never stare or crowd your conversational party...respect their personal space.

Open-ended questions generate valuable insights.

Presentation skills matter! Polish yours.

Questions keep your dialog going. When it stalls, ask more.

Respect others' time by being focused.

Study non-verbal cues of your listener: do they agree, care, understand?

Think before you speak.

Uncover their needs, pain, problems that you can solve.

Value their time by not monopolizing it.

Write a hand-written thank-you note or e-mail to follow up with strangers you meet.

X is a variable whose value is unknown. Get to know others to appreciate their true value.

You are unique. Showcase your uniqueness through your style, what you say and do.

Zzzzzz. What they'll do if you can't keep 'em awake with mutually beneficial conversation!

Effective networking expands your circle of contacts and, by extension, your sphere of influence. Employ the Tao of Networking and watch your business flourish!

About the Author

Craig Harrison's Expressions of Excellence!™ provides sales and service solutions through speaking. Book Craig to present this program to your group. Read more about it at [The Tao of Networking](#).

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