



The 10 Secrets to Successful Networking

article by Chris Atkinson

Having recently presented alongside the Bank of England at an ACCA event on Networking, Chris Atkinson shares his 10 secrets to making a success of this vital business activity.

Networking is the sharing of information and services for mutual assistance or support among individuals having a common interest. Whilst there are specific events for networking, it is an activity that can and should be done at every given opportunity. Networking is your chance to meet and form relationships with people who can help expand your career and organisation. It is an opportunity to exchange ideas, get help and advice, and also provide help and assistance to others. So what are these secrets?:

Don't sell - the first rule and unfortunately the one most broken. We often miss the point with networking, we are trying to connect with intelligent, interesting professionals not sell them stuff! Sales will be a by-product of good relationships which must come first.

Networking is not an event - the formal networking events you are invited to are just a tiny % of what effective networking is about. Ask yourself instead, 'where in life do I meet intelligent, interesting professionals'.

Stop talking - the biggest mistake we can make is to start talking about us and our business before we've understood who we are speaking with and what they are interested in.



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Encourage others to talk about themselves - people love to speak about their lives. All you have to do is ask a few questions and most people will keep the conversation going with only a few comments from you leading them to give further details. Get people talking and before you know it, you'll have plenty of possibilities lined up.

Look to add value - this is your alternative to 'selling'. Think about how you might be able to support or add value to the person you are speaking with. This may be through a product/service you offer but could just as easily be by linking the person with someone you know of.

30 seconds maximum - any pitch or suggestion you make should be no more than 30 seconds then wait to feel for interest. Think of it like a short TV advert!

Networking is an act of leadership - great leaders consistently are well connected. Our professional network is the lifeblood not just of our organisation but also our wider career, see every professional you meet as a new part of your wider network.

Networking is an internal activity as well - your network within your organisation is critical to achieve your goals. Don't just sit and chat to the people you know, get out into the company and meet the people you work with. If you don't have contacts in particular areas or don't have a sense of warmth with a particular team this fuels silo behaviours and damages organisations.

Talk family - be careful to avoid asking if someone is married (easily misinterpreted!), but the people you meet have interesting professional people as partners, siblings, friends, cousins, parents and so on. Don't be shy to ask people about family, for most we love to talk about these people and they can provide some warm contacts to speak with.

Be cautious about online substitutes - slightly more controversial but somewhere in this process networking must be a face to face interaction. All studies into virtual teams and managing remote team emphasise relationships cannot be maintained without real world contact. The same applies to networking, the virtual world may throw up the names and help you find people, but don't expect it to build a relationship for you!

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