

Tip of the Month

Networking Made Easy: 8 Conversation Starters for Those Who Don't Know Where to Start

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By: Catriona Pollard

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Done right, networking can be the silver bullet for building your profile, gaining new business opportunities and building your career. But what happens when you show up to an event and just can't find ways to engage with others?

The secret to successful, strategic networking is to go alone.

For those who are hesitant to approach people on their own and strike up a conversation, taking someone along for support can in fact be a hindrance as you will likely use the event as a catch up.

Likewise, networking isn't about talking to a tonne of people, it is about listening. The most effective networkers are those people who take the time to delve deeper into relationships and find out if there is synergy and opportunity to build a lasting bond.

Networking is about surrounding yourself with a support network for business and life in general. Just turning up isn't enough, you need to be engaged and ready to mingle.

To help you prepare, here are my top eight conversation starters which will give you that all important starting point to building your business network.

1. Simply say hello

Don't over think it. It can be as easy as: "Hello, I'm [name], what's your business (or what do you do)?"

2. Turn to the news and the top headlines of the day

News is always a good topic of conversation so pick a few of the top headlines from the day and ask, "I heard/read about [insert news item] on the way here today. What do you think about it?"

3. Compliments go a long way

Who doesn't love a compliment? It's fairly easy to find something you like about another person, whether it's their outfit, shoes, tie, handbag or a book you see poking out of their briefcase - this something is another great conversation starter.

4. Ask for their advice

Equally, people love being asked for their expert advice! Take note of the organizations on everyone's name tags and start a conversation with someone whose industry you can ask a question about easily.

For example, if you identify someone in training and professional development, "I work in HR for a superannuation company and we use personality testing as part of our recruitment process. Do you have different training methods for different personalities in your workforce?"

5. Tasteful humor

If you're comfortable as the funny guy or girl why not break the ice with a joke? Try something along the lines of, "Can you believe they let me in here dressed like this?" or "I always come to these things for the cute triangle sandwiches. What about you?"



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6. Discuss the event

A big event like a conference can be overwhelming, but an easy way to meet new people is to chat about the program, a speaker you like or the event facilities. A great way to get this conversation started is to ask, "My head is overloaded with great information from today; what gem has resonated with you?"

7. Add to a conversation

Numbers can provide safety, so if you see a group of people chatting and you think you'd prefer the buffer of more than one person, add to their conversation by mentioning an

example to illustrate the speaker's point, or throw in a comment about something relevant that you read earlier that day and then introduce yourself.

8. Look for people by themselves and say hi

If you see someone on their own, think of it as the perfect opportunity to say "hi", ask them how they are and introduce yourself. It can be as easy as that.

Business networking is the single most effective way to build your personal brand and grow your business. Now you have the key to breaking the ice when it comes to conversations - get out there and start building your connections!

About the author

Catriona Pollard is the author of From Unknown To Expert, a step by step framework designed to help entrepreneurs develop effective PR and social media strategies to become recognized as influencers in their field. www.unknowntoexpert.com

Catriona is also the director of CP Communications, which merges traditional PR tactics with cutting-edge social media strategies that engage consumers as well as business. www.cpccommunications.com.au