

# Meeting your BBF (“Best Business Friend”)

## 1. Stop Saying Networking-

Reconfigure what you think when you hear the word “networking.” In fact, scratch that word altogether, and think of your next networking event as an “open exchange”—one with no pressure and plenty of opportunity. At an “open exchange,” you’re free to share ideas, contacts, information, and resources with tons of interesting people. The prospects that inspires are boundless, and it doesn’t cost much more than a conversation. Already sounds better, right?

## 2. Choose Non-Lame Events-

Don’t just go to any old event—choose events where you know you’ll have something in common with people, like conferences that relate specifically to your industry or happy hours put on by your alumni association. It’s much easier to make conversation in these groups than it is at more general events.

## 3. Or, Host Your Own-

Email 10 of your friends, suggest a place and date, and ask each person to bring someone new. To keep the event more professional, you could plan a structured conversation about everyone’s career goals, status of their job satisfaction, or even current industry trends.

## 4. Volunteer-

Instead of just attending an event, “volunteer to help with raffles or name tags. It’ll give you an excuse to talk to people, and that makes it much easier to follow through and be social. Plus you never know whom you’ll meet.” Success Coaching

## 5. Think Outside the Networking Event-

Remember, not all networking has to happen at cocktail hour types of events. In fact, some of the most interesting relationship-building can happen elsewhere. See if there’s a conference you can attend, a hackathon you can participate in, or even a project you can help with. These sorts of events will put you in a much more collaborative environment that will allow you to get to know people in a different way than by simply drilling them with questions.

## 6. Go Out to Dinner-

If you love to try new restaurants, joining a social dining site is a great way to connect with others. Sites like BlendAbout revolve around group dining experiences with people who share common interests—think yoga enthusiasts going out for a raw food dinner or fellow freelance writers dining on sushi. Having a meal with a bunch of folks who share not only your love for food but other interests as well makes it easy to strike up conversations.

## 7. Do Some Snooping-

Before any event, research the attendees ahead of time by looking at the guest list or checking Twitter to see who’s tweeting in advance of the event. Find out who they are, where they work, and what the overall dynamic is going to be at the event. When you know what to expect, you’ll not only feel more relaxed, but you can also come up with some conversation starters that are customized to the group of people you’ll be spending time with.

**8. Pick a Goal-** For each event you to go, set a goal—say, making 10 new connections that evening, or striking up conversation with three people. When you meet it? You can head out—and pat yourself on the back. Or, even better:

**9. Treat Yo’self-** Think of what you’d rather be doing instead of going to the event, and set it up as a reward for yourself for after you go. Say, if you leave the event with three business cards, you’re allowed to meet your friends for a drink or rent a movie for the night. That way, you’ll get some solid networking in, but still have time to rejuvenate.

**10. Bring a Wingman-** If you're really nervous about attending a networking event, bring a friend along with you. While you don't want to talk to the same person all night, it can be easier to approach and meet people when you have someone else by your side. And when you do split up, you can contact-swap the interesting people you meet.

## **11. Dress for Networking Success-**

Skip the boring black suit, and wear something that makes you feel great—your favorite blazer, a statement necklace, or your go-to power meeting outfit. Walking into a room feeling comfortable and knowing you look fabulous is a serious confidence booster.

**12. Go in With Conversation Starters-** Walking up to someone you don't know is a whole lot easier when you have a few go-to icebreakers in your back pocket. Our favorites? Anything related to food ("I can't stop eating these meatballs. Have you tried them?"), a non-controversial news topic ("Wow, I just can't believe all the crazy headlines today. What a week!"), or something funny ("I'll be honest, the only person I know here is the bartender, and I just met him two minutes ago. Mind if I introduce myself?"). Even something as simple as "What a beautiful venue. Have you been here before?" works great.

## **13. Grab a Drink**

Seriously, heading to the bar is a great activity to do when you first walk in a room. It gives you someone to talk to right off the bat (the bartender), a chance to make small talk with people around you as you wait for a drink, and something to hold while you circulate the room.

## **14. Pretend You're at a Dinner Party**

You're interesting, you're likeable, and you have a lot to say—just ask your friends and family. So, instead of entering into conversations trying to find the perfect thing to say or worrying that you're not interesting or witty enough, just pretend you're at a dinner party with your closest friends, and be yourself.

**15. Set Your Emotional Vibe to Curious-** "Rather than gritting your teeth and diving in aggressively, take a moment to re-set the desperate or anxious emotional vibe you're giving off...setting your emotional vibe to 'curious' rather than 'how-soon-can-I-leave' or 'I need everyone to notice me.' This can go a long way to make people feel at ease. It's like turning on an inner smile; suddenly you become more of a potential friend and ally, and less of a threat." *Get Storied*

## **16. Approach Pairs, Not Singles**

"If you see a pair of people talking, the chances are that they arrived together and know they should be mingling. Or else they've just met and are, in the back of their minds, worried that they're going to end up talking to this one person all night. (You've just made it easier for one of them to exit.) Either way, they're relieved to see you. And your chances of having a decent conversation are better, because now you're talking to two people, not just one." *Inc*

## **17. Get Personal**

Look for a common spark as you're talking with someone, and don't worry if it doesn't involve work. In fact, it's often more meaningful if it doesn't. It goes without saying that people are more likely to want to help and get involved if they feel a personal affiliation with you.

## **18. Ask Interesting Questions**

"My favorite question is: 'What's keeping you busy these days?' It's useful because it allows people to choose their focus (work, volunteer, family, hobby), and it is preferable to the inevitable question (well, inevitable at least in New York City): 'What do you do?'" *Positively Positive*