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7 Networking Tips for Shy People

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Wherever you network, both formally at business events and informally at social and relaxed environments, there are always several people at the event that are very confident, loud and chatty. They seem to move effortlessly around talking and laughing with everyone like a happy butterfly and for a shy person, just even thinking about becoming the networking butterfly can make us feel tight in the chest, worried and wanting to leave before we even begin.

Networking is not a normal and easy activity for many people, it is a skill that must be learned and appreciated. In business and life generally, a majority of success comes through talking to others and involving them in your ideas, plans or projects. That is what happens when we network – we connect with others. I work with many business owners, sales professionals and executives in the area of networking and sales growth and many say they are shy. This article outlines 7 Key tips on how shy people can network and get fantastic results.

1. Be Yourself

Shy people become intimidated and nervous because they think a successful networker is the happy butterfly described above. This is not true. Let's face it, the happy butterfly people love to talk and someone has got to listen to them! Yes, shy people have the advantage in networking as they are usually listening far more than they are talking. So at an event, as people talk and move around, you will be able to hear opportunity, understand what people need and be in a position to do something about it. Remember, being shy is an advantage!

2. Set Intentions

When you attend a networking event always have an intention. This is vitally important, as it is your own secret mission. Have you ever gone to an event and were disappointed with the whole thing, the people there and thought it was a waste of your time and effort? I can guarantee you got that experience because an intention wasn't set. Setting intentions can be easy and fun. They can be big and small. For example an intention you could set could be... I am going to have fun tonight, I am going to meet 5 new people this afternoon, and I am going to talk to 3 people about my company today. The intention you set reminds you the whole time why you are there and compels you into action to make sure you get it.

3. Pre-Event Research

You may be shy, however, being stupid and putting your foot in it, is a choice! If you want to avoid saying embarrassing things at an event because you have been overwhelmed by coming to the event in the first place and are nervous to speak, do a little bit of research beforehand. If it's a business event, find out who's hosting, why are they holding it, what type of people will be there and is there anything interesting about the event. If it's a social setting, again, find out who is the host, what type of people will be there and what are the relationships of the people attending to the host and each other. Knowing about your event will put you more at ease, will prepare you in remembering key names and will assist you in conversations.

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4. Speak Up

When you hear in conversation an opportunity or an idea that fits into your area of knowledge or business, speak up. That is your time to say something. It might be a question, statement of fact or opinion. You **MUST** speak. Being shy does not give you permission not to speak at all; it gives you permission not to be the happy, chatty butterfly networker. Also, when you do speak, make sure people can hear you clearly and also, make sure you say things that are easy to understand. Being cryptic, arrogant and conceited when you speak doesn't build rapport, it separates you. When networking, you want to make connection with others, make that job easy for you and for them.

5. Focus Questions

To start conversation, always have several Focus Questions that you know off by heart that will open up conversation and more importantly direct the conversation towards your area of expertise and intention for the event. For example, say you had the intention of meeting 3 people at an event that you could do business with. Your memorised Focus Question could be... 'So, what's the biggest challenge you are currently dealing with in your company?' or 'How do you work with the market being in such a state of change?' Now not everyone is going to provide relevant answers to your line of work or interest. They may not be a potential lead, however, they are going to find out about you and what your expertise is (which is excellent) and you are going to find out some very interesting answers and information about the people you meet.

6. Direct Conversation

Many times we get caught up in someone else's story about an adventure, holiday or mishap. While many stories are interesting, there will be times when you are bored, annoyed or frustrated that this one person is talking so much. Learning how to direct conversation is a handy skill as you can gently move the focus off the other person and create group discussion or an opportunity for you to speak. To direct the conversation, ask a Focus Question when there is a natural pause in the discussion or you can interrupt the conversation when there is a pause by saying quietly to the person or group... 'I have a question I'd like to ask, do you mind if we take the conversation in a different direction?' This works, as most people will be interested in someone choosing a topic to talk about that's not industry gossip, the same old conversation etc.

7. Use Business Cards

Business cards are the essential tool for successful networking. Many shy people don't like giving their cards to others because it's a 'pushy' thing to do. One way to get around this is to ask the other person for their card first. Simply saying... 'Do you have a card?' will work and if they are interested in you they will ask you for yours. The other essential element to business cards to take your business cards with you everywhere you go. Keep some in your car, bag/briefcase, jacket pockets, and luggage. You only need a few handy, just in case. You never know who you might connect with waiting in a que, at the shop, movies, business events, café, golf course, school or a the family get together. Be prepared. Ask your Focus Questions wherever you can to create conversation and have your business card handy. Remember, a business card is a memory jogger for the person you're giving it to. You want to help people remember you and get in contact with you. Happy Networking! ☺