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## **Become a Business Networker Extraordinaire**

by Mary Jeanne Vincent

We've all heard it before: "Just get out there and network!" If it was that easy, we would already be doing it. So why is it so hard? Well, you're an introvert, aren't you? Enough said.

However, unless the prospect of not meeting your business goals excites you, you have to get out there and connect with people who don't know you but who could benefit from your products and services.

Below are a baker's dozen of tips to help you build your reputation as a business networker extraordinaire.

- 1. Attend with a purpose in mind.** Be choosy about the events you attend. Pick the ones that interest you most. It could be a ribbon cutting for a new business, a chamber of commerce mixer, SPCA benefit, or a meeting of like-minded business professionals.
- 2. Take a friend.** Make a game of it. Challenge each other to beat your stated goals with the winner treating for ice cream.
- 3. Plan ahead.** Set a networking goal to talk with at least five people and exchange business cards with individuals who could potentially benefit from your product or services.
- 4. Split up.** Rule #1 is you can't talk to your networking partner until you've met the goals you've set for yourself. That means you can't sit with each other, hang around the food table together, or accompany each other to the rest room. However, you may smile encouragingly across the room.
- 5. Surprise, it's not about you!** Walk up to someone you don't know. Ask the other person an opening question. It can be something as simple as, "What made you decide to attend tonight?," "What brings you to this meeting?," "Do you attend often?," or "What kind of work do you do?"
- 6. Focus on them!** Ask compelling questions: "Tell me more about your work or business." "What is a good referral for you?" "What kind of challenges are you or your organization facing in today's marketplace?" Get them talking about themselves and then offer a little information about you and your business.
- 7. Create a compelling commercial.** When it's your turn to tell them about yourself, take fifteen seconds or less to capture their attention and make them want to know more about your products or services.
- 8. Take little steps.** Don't force yourself to join a large boisterous crowd. Instead, seek out a friendly looking individual who isn't part of a group. Smile and extend your hand in greeting. He's probably as relieved as you are to connect with a friendly stranger.
- 9. What's in it for you?** Everything! Most new businesses rely on referrals to build their client base. People want to do business with people they like and trust! Use this networking opportunity to make new friends.
- 10. Visibility is key.** As an introvert, I've learned three important things about networking: You've got to get out there and be seen; the more you do it, the easier it gets; and the more people you know, the

greater your chances for making meaningful connections.

**11. Get on the fast track.** Join a networking group. Your comfort level and connection quotient will grow astronomically when networking is part of your regular routine.

**12. Smile!** Be approachable. Make others want to meet you and get to know you better.

**13. Make a date to follow up.** Make it your goal to connect with at least one person that you would like to get to know better. Invite him or her to meet by telephone or for coffee. Look for ways to make the meeting mutually beneficial.

You have a whole world of valuable contacts to share and new ones to make, so apply these networking tips. Before you know it, you'll earn the reputation of business networker extraordinaire!

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