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[**How To Network The Right Way: Eight Tips**](http://www.forbes.com/sites/theyec/2014/07/28/how-to-network-the-right-way-eight-tips/#7498767f4595)

*By Andrew Vest*

Most people attend networking events to gain something: job leads, referrals, exposure, connections, opportunities to grow their business. Having organized more than 50 networking events over the past 10 years, I’ve seen plenty of these people leave disappointed, dismissing networking as a complete waste of time.

But I’ve also seen the opposite. I’ve seen people walk out with a handful of business cards feeling happy, inspired and excited. The major difference between these two groups of people is this: the people who leave on a high note are those who attend with just one goal in mind — to figure out how they can help others in the room.

True networking occurs when there’s an understanding that everyone in the room has equal value. In its purest form, it’s about people enjoying other people, communicating passions and connecting with others who share those passions. It’s about listening, figuring out what others need and connecting them with people you think can help, without any designs for personal gain. The most successful networkers build genuine relationships and give more than they receive. They go beyond thinking, “What’s in it for me?” to ask “How can I help?”

To follow their approach, here are eight ways to network successfully and have fun doing it.

**Start networking before you need it.**

Seasoned networkers can smell the stench of desperation from across the room. People can sense when someone is only out to help himself. Tip-offs ranging from a panicked look in the eyes to a portfolio brimming with resumes will send them running in the other direction. On the other hand, by networking when you have no ulterior motive, you can begin to build relationships and a reputation for being generous rather than self-serving.

**Have a plan.**

Since every person has value, it’s essential that you know what yours is. Before you attend any networking event, get clear on what talents, strengths, skill sets and connections you can bring to the table. Map out what you want to talk about, particularly how you may be able to help other people, either now or in the future.

**Forget your personal agenda.**

While you may be tempted to network just to land a job or talk to people you normally wouldn’t have access to, that’s a mistake. Instead, make it your goal to be open, friendly and honest, and to forge connections between people who may be able to help each other. Generosity is an attractive quality and it’s something special that people will remember about you.

**Never dismiss anyone as unimportant.**

Make it your mission to discover the value in each person you talk to. Ask questions and listen with interest. Don’t make the mistake of discounting people due to their titles. Someone you meet may “just” be a clerk, but they may have valuable connections or knowledge you’d never learn about if you’d dismissed them.

Then, when the conversation ends, remember what that person has to offer as you move to the next.

**Connect the dots.**

Once you begin to listen to people and learn what they can bring to the table, you’ll start realizing how one person in the room may be able to help another. Make it a point to connect people you feel have something of genuine value to each other. When you go out of your way to make those potentially promising connections, you’re doing your part to make the networking event a success.

**Figure out how you can be useful.**

Before any conversation comes to a close, be sure to ask, “How can I help you?” Because it’s done so rarely, you may encounter a surprised look, but it will most likely be accompanied by an appreciative smile. While the person may not have an answer for you that night, they may have an idea later. Always close by saying something like, “If you need anything, please reach out to me or connect via LinkedIn” and present your business card.

**Follow up and follow through.**

If you told someone you’d get in touch with them, do it and reaffirm your intent to assist in any way you can. If you promised to introduce someone to a person you know, take the time to do it. Everyone is busy these days with jobs, families, events, commitments – even so, it takes no more than a minute to shoot off an email to introduce two people you want to connect. They can take it from there and do the work — just enjoy being the bridge. Little things like that mean a lot to people and just one introduction can end up changing someone’s life for the better. I’ve seen it happen dozens of times and it’s quite gratifying.

**Believe in the power of networking.**

When you believe that the true value of networking lies in helping others and you do your part, you’ll soon discover magic happening all around you. The beauty of this approach is that you never know when that magic may cast its spell on you.

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