



Releasing the potential of people in business

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## **NETWORKING IN PROFESSIONAL SERVICE FIRMS**

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Networking is a business and personal marketing tool and, put simply, forms part of your overall marketing mix. That's it. There is no mystery here at all.

Interested in discovering tried and tested techniques that allow anyone to become a successful face to face networker? Perhaps you are:

- An associate or partner, searching for that lucrative new client
- An L&D or HR specialist looking to promote your firm
- Wanting to raise your profile at work or in social circles
- Determined to get that coveted promotion and make more money
- Just promoted and still stalling on making those vital connections
- Already good at networking but want to check you are not missing any new ideas
- Fearful about the whole prospect of networking
- Planning on how to get that dream job with another firm
- Wanting ideas about how to run a networking session in your firm

Your success lies in your ability to network, and here is our guide to what will help you become successful at networking - and enjoy it!

*Don't be good – be brilliant!*

### **Why network?**

Networking is about marketing – yourself, your firm, and its services or products. Effective business networking is about the linking together of individuals who, through trust and relationship building, find ways of working together.

Did you know that:

- Recruitment agencies all agree that 70% of roles are found through networking.
- All good networkers I know will say that up to 90% of their new business comes from word-of-mouth marketing, referrals and networking?

If working a room is so much fun and so profitable, why do our hearts thump, our palms sweat, and our eyes glaze over when we think about it?

One reason is that 88% of us think of ourselves as shy. When we get invited to a meeting, conference or party, we shy away from the opportunity to avoid the discomfort.



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"Most people experience 'situational shyness'," says Dr. Philip Zimbardo, author of *Shyness and What To Do About It*. Certain situations make all of us reticent.

Here are a few limiting beliefs that may hold us back:

- Wait to be properly introduced
- Don't talk to strangers.
- Don't be pushy - good things come to those who wait.
- Better safe than sorry (risking rejection)
- He/she only wants one thing! (harassment!)

The trouble is, they worked a lot better when we were 6 years old than they do now that we are 26 or 56!

There are plenty of books to read on the subject. Here are the top 10 ideas that will separate you from the rest and allow you to make the most from any networking event. Follow these guiding principles, and you will help your firm with its reputation, get yourself noticed and improve your confidence:

**1. Decide why you are networking**

If you don't have a strong enough personal reason to network, you are unlikely to sustain your attention on this important activity. It is vital that you create a compelling personal reason to get out there under your own steam.

- Refine your reasons for networking, such as career development, winning new contacts/business, to position yourself as an expert, to learn and/or to make new friends
- Clarify what sort of contacts you need to achieve your aims
- Work out how many contacts you need to make to 'get the job done'
- Do you know the names of the people you want to contact, their title, their business or what membership organisations you should join?
- Where are your priorities and how will you allocate your time

**2. Avoid a common misconception - it's not just about selling**

Lots of people have a hesitation about face to face networking because they think it is about selling, and most people do not see themselves as sales people. There is good news here – the best networkers I know are facilitators – they make it easier for people to do business together. They are great at listening and giving. They do not overtly sell – because, let's face it, no-one likes being sold to.



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### 3. **Prepare well**

Ask yourself what your goals are in participating in networking meetings so that you will be clear about whether you have been successful.

Have a clear understanding of what you do and why, for whom, and what makes your doing it special or different from others doing the same thing. In order to influence and convince, you must first have a clear understanding of what you do that you can easily articulate to others.

Be able to articulate what you are looking for and how others may help you.

- Who is going to be there?
- What is the format of the event?
- What is the dress code?
- What do I want to achieve?

### 4. **Make sure you access a resourceful state**

People like confident, relaxed individuals, so when attending an event you're aiming to relax, enjoy yourself and allow others to get to know you so that they can talk positively about you when you are not in the room. Think of a time when you were curious or enthusiastic or open or confident. Make sure you remember an actual event as a movie in your head, full of colour, noise with you at the centre of the action. Create a vivid scene and it will make you feel that state in the present.

### 5. **Ask questions and listen!**

People are interested in WIIFM – what's in it for me? They will react positively if you put yourself in the other person's shoes, and think – why should they listen to me? How can I meet what they might want? Meet people in their map of the world.

Ask open-ended questions in networking conversations - ask who, what, where, when, and how as opposed to those that can be answered with a simple yes or no. This form of questioning opens up the discussion and shows listeners that you are interested in them

Keep in mind that networking is about being genuine and authentic, building trust and relationships, and seeing how you can help others.

Become known as a powerful resource for others. When you are known as a strong resource, people remember to turn to you for suggestions, ideas, names of other people, etc. This keeps you visible to them.



Show interest in others: maintain eye contact, self-disclose, ask questions and actively listen. Memorise at least ten good generic questions, remembering that quality questions have a strong 'emotional hook' to stimulate the conversation.

**6. Master your personal branding**

Your personal brand is what people remember about you when you are not there and it affects people's decisions as to whether or not they want to build the relationship further, hire or promote you, or do business with you or your firm. It is a combination of your public/professional and private selves.

- Your personal brand will affect your impact at all stages of networking
- Only if your contacts are clear about what you are trying to achieve, and they like and trust you enough, will they be able and willing to pass you the information you are looking for and connect you with the right people
- You should be able to back up your brand message with concrete evidence that you are what you claim
- Your brand needs to be kept up-to-date.

**7. Utilise the power of 3**

In a short period of time people can only take in a maximum of 9 pieces of information. So don't bombard people with lots of information. If you do end up talking about yourself and/ or your firm, restrict what you have to say to 3 key points and reinforce these in your mini presentation. This is called the power of 3. The brain finds it relatively easy to grasp threes - 3 wise men, 3 blind mice, education education, education, etc.

**8. Introduce people to each other with an infectious enthusiasm**

There is no other kind! Motivate conversation between the introducees by assuming that as you introduce people they will find this a particularly helpful connection.

**9. Work a room with ease**

The 80/20 rule applies. People are people the world over, so 80% of your effort should be focused on your interpersonal skills, with the aim of building rapport and trust. As every event is slightly different, 20% of your focus should go on adapting to that environment.



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- Pin your badge top right, to make it easier to read
- Introduce yourself to the sponsors/organisers
- Always re-establish relationships with people you know first
- Repeat names, to help you remember them
- Show genuine curiosity
- Stand on your own for a few minutes and simply watch the room
- Join a group where there is a gap and walk in, making eye contact with one person
- When joining a group, leave a gap to allow others to join in or to leave the group
- Take your leave politely, giving a reason for moving on
- Laugh at yourself when something embarrassing happens and don't take it seriously – just make a note to avoid the pitfall next time.

#### **10. Follow through quickly and efficiently on referrals you are given**

Lots of opportunities open up for you when you network. However many fall into the trap of not following up or following up late. Make the call, drop a quick email or take an agreed action as quickly as possible. When people give you referrals, your actions are a reflection on them. Call those you meet as soon as possible. Arrange a follow up meeting or remind of the action they have promised.

So there we have it – face to face networking in a nutshell. If you have any questions or want to find out how we can run fun and useful networking training at your firm, please email [sue@rtplegal.co.uk](mailto:sue@rtplegal.co.uk) or call 01903 813897.