



Point of View

Network Before You Need It

by Joanne S. Black

Are you shy? I bet you are, because 93 percent of adults, when asked, will say that they're shy. It's not surprising, therefore, that most of us feel uncomfortable at networking events. What did our mother tell us never to do? Talk to strangers. And this is the message that has been ingrained in us since we were small children. On top of that, we're not sure what to say. In fact, we'd rather not be there at all.

But although networking has inspired all sorts of analysis and dread, in the end, it's really just about building relationships and being genuine. You network to sell a product, promote your company, find a job, find new clients, learn the latest from others, or gain more visibility in the business community. Networking opportunities exist everywhere—business meetings, professional associations, alumni groups, sports groups, community groups, weddings, parties, and any place people come together.

But don't forget about your internal network. Build relationships with everyone—no matter what their title. Don't forget the guy in the mailroom, the office assistant, or the custodian. If you're the last person to hear that you're about to have a new manager or that your company is being acquired, you don't have your own office grapevine.

The trick to maintaining a successful internal network is to keep in touch with individual network members: don't call someone only when you want something. Sure it's tough to keep those connections warm, because we're all busy. We get so involved in our jobs that we don't make time for networking. But remember Woody Allen's old adage: "Eighty percent of success in life is showing up." *Showing up counts.* The more often you show up, the more visible you become, and the more people will get to know you and recognize you.

Decide which groups you'd like to join and show up regularly. A good rule of thumb is to err on the side of joining fewer groups and attending most of the time rather than joining many groups and showing up once in awhile. You need to give people the opportunity to get to know you, like you, and trust you. And even more important is becoming active in a group. For example, when you volunteer, people learn how you work—they'll learn that you are dependable and contribute innovative ideas—and you'll begin to develop strong, trusting relationships.

The trick is to keep in touch: don't call someone only when you want something.



Here are some networking tips for group meetings:

Preparation

- Decide which events to attend and put monthly attendance on your calendar
- Set a goal for each event
- Travel solo—if you came with someone, split up—so that you can both meet new people.
- Plan your personal introduction and prepare insightful questions

Interaction

- Don't spend time talking to people you already know
- Look for friendly conversations and move graciously from group to group
- Look for a person standing alone
- Ask, "How can I help you?"

Tools for Effective Networking

- Wear your name badge on the right
- Read and use the person's name
- Have a "ton" of business cards—keep them everywhere—in your pocket, your wallet, your briefcase, and in your car.

Above all, relax and have a good time. Your shyness won't matter anymore, because you'll truly be enjoying yourself.

Join fewer groups and attend most of the time rather than joining many groups and showing up once in awhile.

Take the first step...

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Joanne S. Black

*Joanne Black is America's leading authority on referral selling and the author of **No More Cold Calling™ The Breakthrough System That Will Leave Your Competition in the Dust**, from Warner Business Books. She developed her No More Cold Calling practice in 1996 and now reaches thousands of people each year. Her Referral Selling System has increased the performance of many top companies including: California State Automobile Association, CCH Knowledge Point, Charles Schwab, Colliers International, KPMG, The Marlin Company, and The Mechanics Bank.*