Top Ten Networking Tips for Professionals

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1. Lunch Up
Get out from behind your desk. Add a few breakfasts, lunches and coffee/drink appointments to your calendar. Invite prospects, current clients and possible referral sources to join you for a meal in the real world. Man (and woman) cannot live on phone and e-mail alone!

2. Have Business Cards Handy
Don’t leave home without…your business cards! Bring business cards everywhere you go. You never know when you might meet a great contact. And bring an extra supply when you’re attending a conference or networking event. If you don’t have a corporate business card, consider having calling cards printed up. They may seem old-fashioned, but they’re making a comeback.

3. Keep Contacts Fresh
Touch base with key contacts every few months. Send them a link to an article which may interest them, ask them how their business is going, or wish them a happy birthday. By staying at the top of their minds, you stand a good chance that they’ll call upon you when they need someone with your expertise.

4. Choose Events Wisely
No one in today’s world has unlimited time, so carefully select the events that you attend. If you’ve attended an association event twice and it has yielded no real results, question whether it’s worth continuing to invest time and money in that pursuit. When you decide to go to an event, prepare ahead of time by obtaining the guest list to determine which people you’d like to meet, and ask the organizers to introduce you.

5. Make a Friend First
Networking is not the same as selling – most people don’t like the hard sell. Instead, they prefer to work with people they like and trust. If you don’t know anyone at a particular networking event, seek out a person who is standing or sitting alone. Nine times out of ten, he or she will be grateful that you came over. They will remember the gesture – and they’ll remember you!

6. Be Memorable through Sincerity
Some people wear flashy clothes and jewelry to make a lasting impression, but the best way to be memorable is to show a sincere interest in the people you’re meeting. Listen to what they tell you, and ask them questions about themselves. Also, if you have the opportunity to pay them a genuine compliment or to do them a favor, that is always appreciated – and usually remembered. Giving people directions or telling them discreetly that they have spinach in their teeth is a great way to start a conversation and create an instant bond.

7. Remember Names and Details about Others
How many times have you met someone several times and you keep forgetting the person’s name? This can be embarrassing and detrimental to the impression you want to make. Develop creative techniques to remember people’s names and write details about them on their business cards after you’ve met them. Dale Carnegie’s books and training
provide many useful techniques to tackle this challenge.

8. Leverage Social Networking
Social networking sites can be a great source of business – they’re not just for teenagers! Professional sites like LinkedIn and ZoomInfo are free and give you a completely different outlet through which to contact people and build your contact database. Personal sites like Facebook and MySpace may provide opportunities to rekindle communication with people you’ve met in various settings, including elementary and high school. In addition, blogging can put you in the spotlight, dramatically expand your network, and position you as an expert in your field of expertise.

9. Follow Up - Brush Up on Your Handwriting
You pay the money to go to an event, you meet many people and make a great impression on them, and then…nothing. Follow-up is the crucial point of networking where you can either stand up or fall down. After an event, touch base with each person you met. If you promised to send them something like a person’s name, an article or a book, keep your word and send it. E-mail communication is convenient, of course, but consider sending handwritten notes and following up by phone. Think of how many e-mails you get in a day – and think of how many handwritten notes you get in a month – and you’ll realize that you can stand out better by breaking out your stationery.

10. Be Yourself
To be a great networker, you don’t have to be a brilliant conversationalist or fast-talking salesperson. You do have to be willing to stick your neck out and present yourself to the world. Whether you’re attending events, writing articles, delivering educational training or blogging about your industry, you’re making a contribution and demonstrating your value to the world. Establish momentum in ways that suit your personality. Once the ball gets rolling, you can keep it moving in the direction that you want to go – onward and upward!