



Enjoy this sampling of ideas from the Ingenuity Marketing Group blog, InGenius Review. We have focused this e-book on networking techniques — for professionals new to networking and those who want to integrate in-person networking with online connections. Each short article includes a question for you to consider as a way to improve your networking style. If you would like more InGenius ideas, visit the [InGenius Review blog](#) and subscribe to our quarterly publication.

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# Newbies to Networking – Part I

Like many of you, my first reaction to the idea of networking was **fear of the unknown**. I know as a young professional that I should be networking and I truly want to, but I admit it's a little intimidating and still a bit foreign to me. I decided to embrace this uncharted territory and formally made it one of my 90-day goals. I thought I'd fill you in on the baby steps I've been taking in case some of you are struggling with this too.

## Networking fears that make my palms sweat:

- What if I don't know anyone...or worse, what if no one talks to me? It seems like everyone knows everyone at these types of events.
- What do I say to start conversation without sounding like an idiot? Do I talk "work/industry" or "personal" or both? Which is correct?
- Is it just about meeting people at an event? How do people become part of your network?

Sound familiar? To get over the hurdle of putting myself out there, I needed some coaching. My boss has a favorite book on the topic of networking skills that she recommended. It's called, "How to Work a Room" by Susan Roane. It's a quick read full of good advice on how to **be more confident** when working a room. Between the tips I gained from this book and in consulting with a few of my co-workers (who are serving as my networking mentors), I am learning that the reality of networking is that a majority of people are uncomfortable at events where they don't know a good number of people. Whew, I'm not alone.

## Here are a few pointers I've found helpful:

- Seek out other "solo" attendees and approach them; extending yourself to others to make them feel more comfortable not only gives you something to do but will also make you more comfortable.
- Have courage to approach people and show them you care. Be an **engaged listener**. Who doesn't appreciate that?
- It's the "norm" to talk briefly with each person you meet - maybe 5-8 minutes and then it's ok to politely move on.
- Plan for the event you attend. Bring an ample supply of business cards. If you have access to the guest list, review it to see whom you want to meet and make a point to meet them.
- It's ok (and preferable) to start conversation on a personal level to build rapport. Talking business comes later.
- After the event, ask your best connections to connect with you on LinkedIn so you can find out more about them — and their connections.

Since deciding to increase my networking efforts, I have put my new findings to the test at two events: a Chamber of Commerce meeting and an association meeting. I think both went well. I connected with a couple of people at each event, had very enjoyable conversations (most of which were personal instead of professional) and even left with a business card or two...all without hyperventilating.

## QUESTION:

What are some good conversation starters you use when meeting people at networking events?

# Newbies to Networking – Part II

My initiation into networking continues, although I might add, slowly. In order to **feel more comfortable**, I have practiced my new skills by attending a couple more association meetings. I've also increased my presence on Facebook and LinkedIn and attempted the next stage: follow-up. I'm finding this is more difficult than the initial meeting because I am not sure who to follow up with and what to say. After briefly speaking to someone at an event, I don't want my next interaction with them to be perceived as a "sales pitch." I'm also not sure when to **bridge the gap** between talking about personal stuff and introducing professional stuff. Thanks to my networking mentors, I've learned a few tips:

- The first thing to determine when meeting people at events is to decide whether or not they'd be a good fit for your network. Not everyone you meet needs to be someone you follow up with. Sometimes they'll end up being familiar faces at the next event but not necessarily someone to add to your professional network and that's okay. If they are a good fit, follow up within a week or so after the event.
- When you enter a business card in your contacts database or Outlook contacts, add some sort of personalized note about where you met and what you talked about. For example, if the contact mentioned travel or the names of their children, note that and reference it in future email/calls if applicable.
- Call or email them to see if they would be interested in meeting for coffee or over lunch. This should be a casual "getting to know you further" interaction where you can learn more about their job, their ideal client and their firm. This will set the groundwork for you to be able to make referrals to them as you meet more and more people. They typically will ask about your business too, so be prepared to answer their questions in a way that will help them help you.
- Watch for articles that may be of interest to them and send them with a note

that says, "Thought of you when I saw this — did you see it?" Your question and thoughtfulness may spark a new exchange.

- If you connected on a personal level, it's OK to email about personal topics; it only enhances the connection. Just don't inundate their business email with too much personal information. And remember, unless declared otherwise, this is still a business acquaintance and not a new friend. As young professionals, we may not be in positions of power yet to make business decisions so building and maintaining relationships now will strengthen our business relationships later.
- If you invite them to be a connection via LinkedIn, review their connections to see who else you'd like to meet. Ask for an introduction.
- Invite them to events they may be interested in – your firm's next open house or a speaker or seminar you think they may find interesting.

Much to my relief, I have learned that **follow up and continued contact** are expected and welcomed in networking. Now, it's a matter of making the time to do it on a continuous basis. Don't let lack of follow-up ruin your chance of making valuable connections.

## QUESTION:

What are your follow-up methods to sustain the connection after meeting someone at networking events?

# How Not to Network

I genuinely enjoy people. I can listen to anyone talk about their passions and have a great time. However, I don't have enough time in my schedule to meet with all those people one-on-one later. What do I do when I've just had a charming conversation with someone and they say, "We should really get together sometime?"

Years ago I'd have dutifully written down their number and then felt guilty until I called them, which in my case could be a long time. The first lesson I learned in managing the staggering number of connections we make in the modern world is: **stop feeling guilty**; everyone is meeting more people than they can manage.

The biggest difference between my 20s and 30s socially is that now in my 30s I can admit to myself when I have no interest in pursuing a connection with someone and avoid the reflex of saying, "We should get together," when I really mean, "I enjoyed meeting you."

Tell yourself **the truth** and don't beat yourself up. Don't waste your time and theirs by pretending you're going to schedule something or, worse yet, force an event to happen that gives no value to either party. Take a breath and ask internally, "Would I honestly enjoy an hour of this person's time? Would it add value to both of us?" If the answer is no, it's much better to genuinely express what you enjoyed about the conversation and then let the flow of the event move you away from each other.

At first it seems like anti-networking to make it harder for people to connect with me, but the positive side is that it opens up my schedule and my attention for the people I want to know. When I sit down with a person, he or she knows they have my attention and interest. So while you might think you want 200 or 300 LinkedIn connections, 10 well-cultivated relationships are far **more powerful**.

## QUESTION:

How will you qualify good networking relationships in person and online?

# Get Noticed Networking

The elevator doors open and a room full of your peers and associates are milling around exchanging pleasantries and business cards. Mary Case's quote "**No pressure, no diamonds**" keeps running through your head. You need to bring in a few new clients and you know there are diamonds in the room somewhere, but what do you say? How do you start the conversation?

When I first started out in sales, I attended numerous trade shows. I endured days of walking from booth to booth, cocktail parties and happy hours in the hotel lounge. I'd rather have transposed Webster's into Chinese with dull crayons. I did not have a product that could sell itself and my main competition beat me on price almost every time. When I entered that show floor or cocktail party, I needed something to say that they hadn't heard a hundred times before: great service, quality product, fair price, knowledgeable staff and so forth. My solution? I became interested and interesting.

**Be interested.** I started doing research on my client's industry. A manufacturer I worked with used bamboo. I read industry articles and researched the issues surrounding bamboo farming. When I asked them how the farming environment had affected their manufacturing, they were shocked I knew of the issue at all. They figured if I took the time to learn about what was happening in their business, I would understand their needs better. I got the contract.

Be interested in them on a personal level too. If they told you that their oldest child just left for college, ask where. Before you see them the next time, visit the college's website. See how the football team is doing or if there is anything else you can relay showing interest. For example, "How is Mary doing at Penn State? I see they just won their first game of the season."

**Be interesting.** Have you read a good book, visited a museum, read an interesting industry article, taken up cooking or juggling or volunteered? Do you scan the newsfeeds for the news of the day? Read credible blogs pertaining to your industry to see what the buzz is? Who are the leaders in your industry and what are they doing? If the business talk is finished, you need to have something of interest to say to solidify your connection or an interesting bit of information to offer that will be remembered.

If your industry on a whole does the same thing and provides the same sort of services, then you are the difference. Become the sort of person people want to be around; be interesting.

Part of being a good conversationalist is having something of **value** to say. Anyone can talk, but not everyone can communicate.

**QUESTION:**

What makes you so interesting?

# Credible Networking

When you sell services, you sell much more than knowledge or experience; you sell other essential, yet invisible commodities like trust, security and integrity.

Most importantly, you sell credibility. Your own. Without credibility, talk of your valuable talents will ring hollow. Promises made will appear to be promises already broken. How do you reflect credibility before you've had a chance to prove yourself? Here are a few suggestions:

**It's okay to fake it.** Self-confidence, that is. You might have graduated and bought a few good suits, but you still feel like a kid playing pretend. Fortunately, people won't know unless you clue them in with your body language, attitude or appearance. Everyone feels like an imposter in the beginning. If your first big presentation is freaking you out, don't sweat it. The trick is to appear confident. If you have to be an imposter, be a great one.

**Know your audience.** To build credibility, it's important to know and respect the expectations of your audience. I've got a daughter who thinks tattoos are cool, but my dad equates them with prison or a low moral character, and I fall somewhere in between. Ideally, your credibility should span generations, especially when you're handling people's personal finances.

**Look the part.** When I was 33, I bought a pair of horn-rimmed glasses even though I had perfect eyesight. I called them my intimidators and I wore them to law firms because they fit the role I needed to play. Now I can wear more artsy clothes and frames. My clients, law firms and CPAs, don't want a consultant in a three-piece suit but they do want their banker in one.

**Don't fake what really counts:** Smarts. Admitting the truth about your knowledge and asking for help are paramount to building credibility, especially with higher-ups. Other ways to demonstrate credibility and smarts include direct eye contact, confident body language, and asking the questions that allow you to uncover all the details of the job.

**Admit your mistakes.** Sometimes you have to step back to move forward. The only way to regain credibility if you've made a mistake is to be open and honest and to claim responsibility. Address the problem ASAP, even if it's something simple like wearing the wrong attire to a business meeting, and you'll be better off.

**Find strength in numbers.** Form alliances with co-workers and colleagues by talking highly of them, and asking them to do the same. Joining forces with a few like-minded talents in a class of 50 newly hired CPAs, on the premise you're going to promote each other's work, seems like a no-brainer to me. I wish I had done this when I was younger.

**Know yourself.** Credibility is about believability. It's important to be authentic so you can attract people who will authentically enjoy working you. This holds true for your promises, too. The threshold of credibility is making good on your word.

I would also recommend reading Harvey J. Coleman's "Empowering Yourself: The Organizational Game Revealed." While I didn't agree with every suggestion, it's a good book about power, influence and credibility. You have my word on it.

## QUESTION:

How will you practice credibility?

# Relationship Networking

At Ingenuity, we talk a lot about success and the P.I.E. Formula. This formula was developed by Harvey Coleman as he worked his way up the ladder at IBM. Surprisingly simple, it points out the peril of thinking that “quality work” alone will bring you success. His P.I.E. formula suggests that:

**Success is 10% performance.**

**Success is 30% image.**

**Success is 60% exposure.**

Too many people think that good work is the key factor of success, but it means nothing if no one knows you. Your “exposure” means much more. The more you network, the more people you meet. The people who you meet now will one day be in a position of decision-making (if they aren’t already) that will benefit you greatly IF you continue to develop the relationships.

Professional and personal relationships have many advantages, but two of my favorites are:

1. Managers with larger personal networks get higher-paying positions than managers with small networks.
2. Managers with large, well-diversified networks get promoted faster and at younger ages compared to their peers with underdeveloped networks.

I started networking at my first job out of college. Fourteen years later, I believe my network has gotten me to where I am — an owner of a successful business where I love getting up every morning to go to work.

Now is the time to get involved and stay involved. Not only attend networking functions, but also get involved in an industry or practice area association. Volunteering at something for which you have a passion can also be very beneficial. Join a committee and take a leadership position. Keep at it and one day you will be the “manager with the large network” — and all the benefits it provides.

## QUESTION:

How are you making yourself known and famous?

\*The P.I.E. Formula is from “Empowering Yourself: The Organizational Game Revealed” by Harvey J. Coleman.





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