

## Successful Networking for Introverts: 10 Tips



Starting conversations and turning them into relationships that lead to business is more intuitive for some people than for others. BNI helps provide some structure to this process with the practices that have proven to be successful for Members around the world for decades. Here are some tips that may make networking in the rest of your world a little easier if the process is new to you or you are looking for ways to bolster your confidence.

1. Create a business plan that includes specific contacts in strategic companies to help you be intentional in your networking efforts. If you can ask someone to introduce you to a specific person instead of asking for broad categories of connections, you're far more likely to meet the people who can help you move my business forward. This requires some research and planning on your part to know who to ask for, but it's easier to "work a room" if you know who you're hoping to meet.
2. Since one of the most effective ways to illustrate points or persuade listeners is through stories, you may have to have a few rehearsed, quick, and entertaining anecdotes to talk about your business. While facts may be convincing, stories tap into common human experiences in ways that can galvanize and unite groups for a cause. Even in more intimate settings, stories can put people at ease, which makes you seem like a pretty great person to be around!
3. If you've attended a networking event and someone has asked, "What business are you in?" you know that there must be more interesting ways to start conversations. Think of creative ways to engage: "What's your favorite part of your job?" "What have you learned about yourself in this role?" Interesting questions elicit more interesting communication. Before starting conversations, create some interesting questions to facilitate conversation.
4. Tall Guy, Drunk, and the Hostess - Holiday gatherings can be fun AND good for networking with a few tips. Tall Guy is someone at a party who stands out. This could be someone who's tall or a person with interesting jewelry or an unusual haircut. Drinkers are at the bar and they meet everyone! The hostess knows who came and you can ask her who you should meet. Three people to start your networking conversations!
5. Networking in Pairs: Divide and Conquer! Not everyone relishes (or deems possible!) the prospect of walking into a room of strangers alone. Don't! Attending an event with a friend or colleague can bolster confidence and pay dividends in effective results. Just be sure to attend different breakout sessions and chat up different people, though. Then meet to exchange stories and contact information.

6. Talk about what you've learned recently. Without playing the role of teacher's pet, it's fairly easy to make conversation and find topics relevant to all by offering up a fun fact or content from an article you just read. "Do you know what I just learned about SPAM from a blog I read? Yes, the meat!" Far more interesting than, "Some weather we've been having, huh?" Scan news feeds, blogs, and podcasts for subjects to offer.
7. Active listening! Huh? What? Active Listening! Talking to strangers is more intuitive for some people than it is for others. Some want to regale others with tales of professional prowess or worldly woes. Others passively listen without participating. Effective connection falls somewhere in between. Active listening means intentional body language (raised eyebrows, nodding head) as well as clarifying questions when appropriate. Be fully present and try to learn something.
8. Ways to Answer: "How are you?" When you know you'll be asked the same questions at events, prepare memorable, interesting answers to keep conversations lively. When asked, "How are you?" or "What's your business?" answers like "Fine" and "Insurance" are as bland as bland gets. Answering with specific, interesting responses is more fun! Why not, "Today has been challenging, but I've learned a lot." "So far, my day has been remarkable." Please tell us more!
9. Networking is no joke; have some! It's often challenging to create conversations out of thin air with people you've never met. If you're not a natural connector, consider having a joke in your repertoire that you can pull out for eye rolls, if nothing else. Even if it's corny and terrible, everyone will have just shared a common experience, bonding the group for the event! Caveat: consider your audience and make it clean and inoffensive.
10. Take a breath. Relax. Keep moving. After a long day of being "on" for colleagues and clients, sometimes the last thing you want to do is attend an afterhours networking event. It's ok to take a little "me time" to gear yourself up in the car before you slap that smile back on your face! Maybe sit in your car and listen to energizing music. Deep breathing or meditation might help. You can do this!