

Networking for Introverts

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Are you the first to arrive and the last to leave functions, parties, the office, or anywhere? Do you have the ability to waltz up to a table of people you don't know and not only contribute to the conversation, but monopolize the discussion? Are you at the center of the room, trying to reach everyone you can?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you may as well close this post right now...it ain't for you, my friend. You already have skills to network and are most certainly an Extrovert. Or you could learn about those Introverted friends.

So...Do you see that quiet person sitting back observing each in the room, talking to one person perhaps, but somehow not saying too much? That's Introverts...(OK, so I am generalizing here, but let's agree that an outspoken center of life is an Extrovert and the quiet, observant is the Introvert -at least please indulge me for this case.)

I've been on both sides of the room. In my past, I was always the one be-bopping around, passing out cards, shaking hands and more importantly shaking things up. As I've had more public roles in my career and as I've matured in business, I have crossed into the Introvert arena. Now, I gain my energy by jumping on my motorcycle – alone – and heading out for a ride, or working in a space that is just my own. It doesn't make marketing myself very easy!

What is one of my fears? Networking. I have lost the art of small conversation, of getting to know someone, of being interested and being interesting. (I ask it too, what happened, but that is another time.) And...just to let you know...others would not observe me as having this fear...I hide it well.

Knowing that "We teach best what we most need to learn" (a quote on my kitchen cabinet meant to remind me to keep an open mind when I think I know best...) I recently coached two business associates who started their sessions with "Help, I don't know how to network!" Right up my alley, and something I most need to learn - again. After each individual session, the networking tools were in place and each of them had gotten out their calendars to add events to test them out! It was a great reminder of what I needed to bring back into my world.

If you have read to this point, you are probably wondering to yourself what is just one tool I can add to become an Extrovert-like person in the networking arena? Here you go: Questions. Come up with and MEMORIZE five generic (and interesting to you) questions that you can INTENTIONALLY ask anyone who is beside you. Be cautioned however, if you ask a "yes/no" question, that is most likely all the response you can get back. Do ask a curious question, but leave out "What do you do?" – Not everyone works or wants to talk about their career. "What do you think of..." questions can become a debate, so be careful with those. Try out several questions before you decide on the final five. Are they applicable? appropriate? timeless? Test and retest.

I bought a bunch of tear-apart business cards and printed my logo, name and number on one side, with my five questions on the back. It was a fun way to share something that I needed to learn and pass along a great tool to other Introverts.

Whatever questions you determine, make sure to breathe, be sincere in asking and listening, and I promise, you'll soon become the person I'd most want to be sitting near, no matter if you were in the center or on the fringes.

And remember, the art of conversations is mainly listening.