



TIPS FOR “WORKING A ROOM”

It’s natural to feel nervous about walking into a room full of strangers. It takes courage. Keep in mind, however, that employers and other attendees may feel as nervous as you during a networking or other professional event. If you focus on making other people feel comfortable, you will forget about your own discomfort. Here are things you can do before, during, and after the event to ensure success.

Before:

Before attending a networking or business event, research the host’s organization. Know the types of people who will be in attendance, read a few relevant business articles to find conversation starters, and practice how you will initiate a conversation. Make sure you are confident about where location of the event is, how long it takes to get there, and where you can park.

As you get ready, make sure you are well-groomed and dressed in professional attire. Know if there will be appetizers or a meal served at the event so you can eat before you leave if necessary.

Be on time, and if possible, be a few minutes early. Before you leave your car, turn off your cell phone and throw out gum. Now is an excellent time to use breath mints if you have them.

Take a deep breath. It’s go-time.

During:

When you open the door, make sure you are smiling and be courteous to everyone you meet. There will likely be a table where you can make a name tag for yourself; adhere it on the right side of your shirt or dress. You can take a few minutes to scope out who is there, but avoid standing by the wall for too long.

Find someone standing alone to approach and initiate an introduction. Shake hands firmly, look them in the eye, and be your best self. To sustain the conversation, ask about trends in their field. What are some interesting projects they are working on? You could also ask more specifically about their role at the company they work for or their background, but do not ask about benefits or salaries. Another easy way to keep a conversation going is to remark on a tie or piece of jewelry that stands out. Be prepared to answer questions about yourself as well.

Avoid talking to a person for too long and do not hang around the same crowd all night. You are there to meet new people, so push yourself to circulate. Show enthusiasm at the opportunity of getting to meet each person.

Be present with each person you speak to and give them your full attention; avoid “surfing” the room with your eyes when they are talking. Refrain from telling jokes unless you know your audience well.



When you visit the food table, avoid blocking it for too long. Put a few snacks on your plate and move on; you can always return for seconds. If you are not hungry or able to eat the food offered, thank the hostess and continue circulating. Remember that it is not appropriate to drink from a bottle or can unless no glasses are offered.

One last thing, and this is key: do not forget to collect business cards so that, later, you can write things you want to remember about each person you met on the back.

After:

Follow up with people you met by email or written note to say you enjoyed meeting them, and include specific references to the conversations you had with them. Be sure to send a thank you note to the person who hosted the event.