

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. If you focus on making other people feel comfortable, you’ll forget about your own discomfort!

Etiquette is about helping others feel comfortable. By preparing in advance, you’ll feel (and look) poised, comfortable, and relaxed which will, in turn, help others enjoy the experience.

➤ Things to Consider:

- Research the host’s organization before attending an event.
- Read business articles in advance to find relevant conversation starters.
- Wear professional attire and accessories and use excellent grooming and hygiene habits.
- Learn about the location of the event, how long it takes to get there, and where to park.
- Have a little snack before you get dressed so you aren’t focused on hunger.
- Be on time; in fact, be five minutes early.
- Turn off your cell phone, take out your ear buds, and throw out gum.
- Before the event, avoid garlic and use breath mints.
- Take a deep breath, keep good posture, and enter the room smiling.
- When you open the door, it is show time! Be courteous to everyone you meet.
- Place your name tag on your right side.
- Follow the lead of the host.
- Don’t wait— initiate an introduction. Find people standing alone to approach.
- Shake hands firmly; look the person in the eye; and be warm, friendly, and polite.
- Show gratitude and enthusiasm at the opportunity of getting to meet them.
- Be present with the person you are speaking with; give them your full attention.
- Collect business cards and (later) write on the back what you want to remember.
- Follow up with people afterwards by e-mail or written note to say you enjoyed meeting them or to thank them for the event, gifts, advice, leads, or anything else.

➤ What Do I Say?

Ahead of time, practice some opening lines that will break the ice and get the conversation going. Reading relevant newspaper/Internet articles will help as will reviewing the host company’s website. Below are some ideas for starting conversations.

- Ask about trends in their field. Does their company get involved in community sports competitions or charity fundraisers as a group? What are some interesting projects they’re working on that they are allowed to discuss?
- What is your role in your company? How long have you worked there? Where did you go to school? Does your position involve much travel? What is the busiest time of the year for you? Remark on a tie or piece of jewelry that seems unusual or notable. Remark on the nice presentation of the food or the attractive offices. Have statements ready to say about yourself, as well.

**Be natural, be yourself, and be at your most professional.
Etiquette is about common sense, good manners, and**

➤ What to Avoid

- Running late.
- Going to an event unprepared.
- Poor grooming: chipped nail polish, unkempt or unclean hair, scuffed shoes, etc.
- Speaking about politics and religion.
- Telling jokes. Bring your sense of humor but don't tell a joke unless you know your audience well.
- Giving a jellyfish or a bone crushing handshake.
- "Surfing" the room with your eyes when you are talking with someone.
- Being too shy or monopolizing the conversation.
- Trying too hard to impress the recruiter, owner, boss, etc. It'll be obvious to them.
- Putting the host organization on the spot with questions that are too personal or challenging.
- Clinging to the same circle or person the entire time. Circulate.
- Crowding people in a circle as well as not making room for others to enter.
- The scent of cigarette smoke. Cigarette smoke clings to clothes and may be considered offensive.
- Asking about benefits or salary.
- Traveling to another country without doing some etiquette research first. Different cultures and even regions of the U.S. have unique protocols and customs.
- Forgetting to send a thank you follow up message.
- If you don't care to eat, just thank the hostess and say you are passing for now.
- Avoid experimenting with unknown food in front of an employer.
- "Double dipping" from the community dish—instead, spoon the dip or sauce onto your plate.
- Blocking the food table. Select your food then move away.
- Eating like you are starving. Take some food but focus more on the people.
- Loading your plate high; it's best to take a small portion and return for seconds.
- Leaving your dirty plate on the buffet table.
- Drinking from a bottle or can is not appropriate unless no glasses are offered.

➤ Tips For Eating Out With An Employee/Business Connection

- Wait for the host to take the lead with ordering and with business conversation.
- Follow his or her lead. Place your napkin in your lap when he or she does.
- If you have invited the person, you pay the bill.
- Keep passing bread and other communal items.
- Do not make a sandwich out of your roll. Break off one piece at a time.
- Use the water glass to the right of you, the bread plate to the left of you.
- Use the silverware from the outside to the inside.
- Avoid really messy food unless it is a barbeque or pasta meal.
- If there's a problem with your food, quietly summon and tell the server.
- Do not put your used napkin on the table until you get up to leave.
- Do not push your finished plates away or pile them. Let the server do the work.
- Send a thank you note to your host.