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## How to Take the Uncomfortable Out of Networking

Do you avoid networking or treat it as a necessary evil? You are not alone; for many people, networking is a traumatic experience. How do you just walk up to a stranger, or worse, a group of strangers, and start a conversation?

Are you the type of person who hangs around the edges of the room, hoping that someone will come up to you and start a conversation? That can work, but it is limiting and can put the onus on you to answer the person's questions when they approach you. There's nothing wrong with that approach per se, but if you do all the talking, are you more or less likely to achieve your networking objective, which presumably is to get more business?

There are several reasons for reluctance to become a proactive networker. You may feel that people will judge you or look down on you and your business, that they are better businesspeople than you. Guess what? They are probably thinking the exact same thing!

There are, of course, people that treat networking as a competitive sport. They are there to aggressively hand out as many business cards and make as many connections as possible before the event ends. Sadly, they are missing the point; the goal should be building relationships with people, not making irrelevant connections. Think quality, not quantity.

Here are four things you can do to become more at ease at your next networking event.

1. **Talk less.** One of the best strategies to take pressure off yourself is to ask questions. A good question will allow the person standing opposite you, to do all the talking while you relax, smile, and show interest. Studies have shown that in any conversation, the person who talked the

most enjoyed the interaction most. This tactic is a great way to build stronger relationships and meaningful connections.

2. **Be curious.** Building off point one, show that you are genuinely interested in the person's business and what they sell. Ask questions that allow you to discover more about them. The more you know, the more likely you will find common threads between you and your business and them and their business.
3. **Ask better questions.** Avoid stock networking questions such as "What business are you in." This will elicit, at best, an elevator pitch answer. Add to this list of non-questions; inquiries about the weather or whether they have been to one of these events before. Small talk won't get you very far and will ramp up your unease; obvious questions tend to produce non-answers. Instead, ask open-ended questions like, "What do you like best about your business?" Later, ask the opposite question, "What do you like least about your business? This final question might prompt them to say they don't like sales, administration, or something else that you and your business can help them with. Other good questions include, "What is your biggest challenge?" Again, this question has the potential to help you develop your relationship with the person and identify products or services you might provide.
4. **Offer support.** Most people at networking events are there to get business. Admittedly, some people attend for social reasons, especially after being COVID-cooped for the past few years. In either case, most people hope to get something out of attending. Once you have asked your curious questions and stimulated conversation about them, offer to help them in any way you can, regardless of whether there is an inherent business opportunity. Imagine how unique that will make you.

Networking should be viewed as something other than a competition or a way to get new business from the event itself. It should be considered a starting point for new business relationships, from which, when trust has been established, new business for your company might result.

You remove or reduce performance anxiety when you remove the need to sell or promote yourself. All it takes is the ability to ask questions that will help people open up to you.



## The Ten Principles of Successful Entrepreneurship

Ask half-a-dozen successful businesspeople, and they'll each give you a different set of principles for success. These are our ten; feel free to create your own list—it can be an enlightening and rewarding exercise.

1. It's all about selling. It's hard to argue with this one—no sales, no money, no money, no business. Duh!
2. It's never about luck; it's about hard work, planning, and perseverance. Sure, you may face unexpected competition, the economy might take a nosedive, and your primary supplier may go bankrupt. Still, those things happen to all entrepreneurs at one time or another, some survive, and others fold. The decisive factor is you.
3. No vision, no future. If you have little idea of what you want to achieve, you'll never know whether you've reached your goals or fallen short. Ignorance is not bliss. Wave that magic wand and imagine the future you want for your company. When you open your eyes to what could be, new opportunities, previously hidden from view, suddenly become road markers on the journey to success.
4. Optimism is a powerful force. Indefatigable optimism, tinged with a sense of reality, will help you get up one more time than you got knocked down. Stick-to-it-ness is an often overlooked key to success.
5. Don't try to do it alone. Lead from behind. Hire good people who share your vision, and fill in the blanks in your resume. Then manage them with a light touch.
6. Give customers what they want and need, not what you want them to want and need. Solve their problems, and they will help you reach your sales targets.
7. Change is inevitable, and it will often be difficult. Plan for it, expect it and embrace it.



8. Profit is mandatory. Plan to make money and never apologize for the price you need to charge, as long as it is fair. Remember, it is your responsibility to make money for your company.
9. Make technology your friend. We are in the middle of the fourth industrial revolution, and change is constant, especially regarding new ways of doing business and interacting with customers. Don't be a Luddite.
10. Treat customers as your most valuable asset. Number one on this list was *It's all about selling*, and we commented that no sales equal no money; let's take it a step further—if there are no customers, you have no sales. Treat customers like valuable treasures; remember, they always have options.

It would be easy to add another twenty principles to this list, and we recommend you do just that. The more compass points you add to your entrepreneurship journey, the more likely you will reach your destination unscathed and wealthier.



### **Coach's Corner - Stressed or Overwhelmed? Five Ways to Cope.**

*“Many of us feel stress and get overwhelmed not because we're taking on too much, but because we're taking on too little of what really strengthens us.” - Marcus Buckingham*

Brene Brown, in her book *Atlas of the Heart*, talks about the emotions involved in being stressed and overwhelmed. Although related, experiencing stress and feeling overwhelmed are different regarding the level of emotion they generate. Of course, stress may end up leading to periods of overwhelm.

Brown writes of feeling *“stressed when we evaluate environmental demand as beyond our ability to cope successfully.”*

She says that being overwhelmed is *“an extreme level of stress, an emotional and/or cognitive intensity to the point of feeling unable to function.”*

Whether you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed, here are five things you can do that may help alleviate the negative feelings.

1. Do tasks that only you should or can do and delegate the rest. Other activities drain your energy and lead to stress.
2. Be conscious of your time. Choose your activities wisely. Take breaks to energize yourself.
3. Ask yourself, does this really need to be done? What would happen if I didn't do it?
4. Take time to think and meditate. Invest time in reflection to ensure you are treading the right path.
5. Get support from others. Don't be a martyr or a victim; reach out and ask others to help you reduce the stress or overwhelm.

Stress and overwhelm come and go in our professional and personal lives. Too much of either can be detrimental to our health and well-being and take a toll on our relationships. Stress and overwhelm are two emotions that can inhibit your decision-making skills.

Understanding the cause of your stress or overwhelm will help you discover ways to overcome or reduce the effects of these negative emotions.

*“Many of us feel as though we are overloaded and overwhelmed by all the things that are happening, and we can't stop work for even five minutes or we'll fall behind: the idea that if we don't take breaks, we're being more productive.”* Daniel Levitin

Paul Abra, Motivated Coaching


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*“The currency of real networking  
is not greed but generosity.”*

–Keith Ferrazzi

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