

Thirteen Networking Mistakes

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You wouldn't wear jeans to a job interview, but do you pay as much attention to job-hunting etiquette when networking? If you're approaching potential contacts in an offhand way, you may be putting them off entirely.

Learn what the most common networking mistakes are so you don't have to make them.

1) Waiting

Many people start networking only after they've lost their jobs. Effective networking means creating contacts and relationships while you're still employed.

2) Being Clueless

If you're heading to a networking event, make sure you know why you're going. Do you want a job? If so, are you seeking something specific, or will anything do? Are you looking for contacts or a mentor to provide guidance? As soon as someone starts talking with you, you have to hold up your end of the conversation. If you don't know what you want, you can't do that.

3) Being Unprepared

Thinking you know what you want is not the same as knowing it. Treat networking the same way you would an appearance at Carnegie Hall. Practice your pitch as well as your answers to questions about your career goals that might arise.

4) Forgetting Business Cards

There is nothing more embarrassing than establishing a good relationship with someone, extracting a pledge of help and then searching around for a cocktail napkin to write on. Spend a few extra bucks to print professional-looking cards on good-quality paper.

5) Using a Silly Sounding E-mail Name

Sure, your friends know you as "SexyMama4U" or "TimeForHemp," but when looking for work, stick to a serious email address, such as your real name.

6) Being Pompous

While you're networking, you need to listen to what everyone else is saying. People help by offering advice. They are not interested in hearing how much you already know.

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7) Monopolizing Someone's Time

At a networking event, everyone wants to mingle. And if you're networking over the phone or by email, understand that the person you're speaking with has a life that extends beyond you.

8) Dressing Down

Look sharp at networking events. Mind your manners, shake hands firmly, stand up straight, make eye contact and show respect in any way you can. A networking event can be a dress rehearsal for a job interview, but no one will help you get your foot in the door if you give the impression that you'll slouch through it once it's open.

9) Being a Wallflower

Men and women with contacts and power meet many people; they remember only those who stand out from the crowd. Be assertive, and act like a leader. But don't go overboard. You want to convey self assurance, not obnoxiousness.

10) Being Passive

If someone says, "Sorry, we don't have anything right now," take a minute or two to ask follow-up questions, such as:

- "Well, what's the outlook for future possibilities?"
- "Do you know anyone else in the industry who might have something?"
- "Any thoughts on what my next step should be?"

Persistence shows true interest on your part and may help the person you're networking with come up with ideas he might otherwise overlook.

11) Lying

It's tempting to say, "So-and-So gave me your name and told me to call." It might even get you a meeting. But eventually Such-and-Such will learn that So-and-So did not tell you to call. And you'll have burned not one, but two bridges.

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12) Treating Your Networking Relationships as Short Term Flings

No one likes to be used. Follow up every conversation with a thank-you note, e-mail or call. Let your contact know whether his suggestions panned out or not.

When your job search ends, for whatever reason, inform the person who has helped you. You may think your networking is over, but your paths may cross again.

13) Forgetting Where You Came From

Anyone who has ever networked, whether successfully or not, owes an obligation to all those who will network in the future.

Return the favor and help someone else!

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