



NETWORKING FOR THE INTROVERTED OR THE INEXPERIENCED

Introversion vs. Extraversion

Everyone spends time extroverting and time introverting. Your categorization depends on your preference toward spending more time in the outer world of people and things, or in your inner world of ideas and images. It is common to confuse introversion with shyness or reclusiveness; however, they are not related.

You are most likely an extravert if you get energy from active involvement in events, interacting with people, and doing many different activities. If you get excited and energized when you are around people, extraversion is most likely the disposition that is comfortable to you.

If you identify with deriving energy from dealing with ideas, pictures, memories, and reactions that are inside your head, prefer doing things alone or with one or two people, like to take time to reflect so that you have a clear idea how to act, or need alone time to recoup after a cocktail event, you are most likely an introvert. Being an introvert can pose a small hurdle when it comes to networking, though following the advice and suggestions below should help the introvert successfully navigate social situations.

Networking Tips

1. *Embrace your introversion*

Introversion simply means that you derive your energy from introspection. Accepting who you are and becoming comfortable with it will empower you when networking. In fact, embracing your introversion may actually allow you to make even better personal connections with employers! By viewing networking not as an experience driven by “making the rounds” or “schmoozing” with every attendee, but instead as an opportunity to genuinely connect with a handful of people, you are using your introversion to your advantage.

2. *Avoid avoidance*

For an introvert, it is normal to experience some level of anxiety before an event and most find it easy to talk oneself out of attending a networking affair. On the other hand, you also understand how crucial networking is to your future career and how you owe it to yourself to attend. Do not allow yourself to talk you out of going. Oftentimes, you increase the likelihood of attending an event if you tell your intentions to a friend, colleague, or professor.

3. *Extend your boundaries, but be realistic*

Although it is important to push yourself beyond your conventional boundaries, you should avoid pressuring yourself into being something that you are not. If you traditionally are not the life of the party, do not make yourself adopt behaviors or characteristics that are completely out of your comfort zone. Instead, focus on being the best you, whatever that may be. Perhaps you are a great listener or have an excellent sense of humor. Use your strengths to your advantage!

4. *Be prepared... to shift your mindset*

Introverts can be intimidated by the thought of walking into a room full of people they do not know. One way to mitigate this is to obtain a list of attendees prior to the event, so that you have an idea of who will be there, and with whom you may have a pre-existing connection. However, this scenario is not always plausible and it is important to have an alternative strategy.

Setting a goal of connecting with one person at a time and engaging each one in conversation can make the task seem much less daunting. When you have completed the conversation with one person, move to another person who is standing alone or seems to be on the outskirts of a conversation, and start the process again. This approach can be empowering to the introvert, minimize intimidation, and make you feel like you are in control.

5. *Break the ice*

Do not feel like you must say something profound. Breaking the ice can be as simple as commenting on the venue, the program or the food, the weather, or asking people where they are from or which school they attended.

6. *Employ informational interviewing*

The intent of informational interviewing is to network on a one-on-one basis. The approach is appealing to introverts because it allows for a genuine connection to be made in a controlled environment, like an office or a restaurant, and is a great way to expand your network without feeling overwhelmed.

Once the ice has been broken, transition to using open-ended questions that ask who, what, where, when, and how. The goal is to explore ideas and opinions as well as your listening skills. Sample questions include:

- How did you get into your current field of practice?
- What is it about your position that you enjoy most?
- How do you enjoy spending your free time?

Prepare a go-to question to have ready when the conversation is at a lull or you feel the need to say something. However, the lull may also signal that it is an appropriate time to politely excuse yourself, seek out another conversation, refresh your drink, or regroup yourself privately

7. *Schedule time to recharge*

Depending on the event (two-day conference vs. a two-hour reception), introverts may become physically, emotionally, or mentally exhausted from pushing themselves outside their comfort zones. If this happens, you need to find time to decompress and rejuvenate yourself. Be sure to set aside time in which to do this whether it is at the end of the event (reception) or sometime during the event (conference).

8. *Be kind to yourself*

Introverts tend to be high self-monitors and are often unnecessarily critical of themselves. As you are relaxing and debriefing yourself about the event, make sure to avoid focusing only on the things you might have said or did wrong. Chances are no one noticed. Be sure to debrief yourself in a positive manner to reinforce your confidence regarding your networking skills.

The more you network, the more comfortable you will become with it!