



Hate Networking? Try This

EVEN IF YOU FIND SCHMOOZING STRESSFUL, THESE STRATEGIES CAN HELP YOU GET A CAREER BOOST FROM YOUR NEXT INDUSTRY COCKTAIL HOUR. *by Daniel Bortz*

DOES THE THOUGHT of working a room give you the jitters? Networking functions can turn even successful professionals into tongue-tied teens. Some people have such a visceral reaction that they actually feel physically dirty, a University of Toronto study found.

Yet industry events can also be a great place to rub shoulders with influencers, meet recruiters, pick up new skills, and raise your professional profile. So even if you hate schmoozing and small talk, these tricks can help you thrive at your next networking event.

➔ **Go backstage.** Get access to key players by helping organize the event or volunteering on-site. Checking in attendees, for example, enables you to meet people when they walk in the door. Want face time with an industry influencer? “Be the person who picks up the keynote speaker at the airport,” says Carol Linden, author of *The Job Seekers Guide for Extraverts and Introverts*.

➔ **Set a specific goal.** Instead of feeling overwhelmed by the crowd, give yourself a work assignment—say, to make two or three meaningful connections—and then leave once you’ve fulfilled it. “If you overstay, you’re going to get burned out, and you’ll be less motivated to go to networking events in the future,” Linden says.

➔ **Contact people in advance.** Get a list of attendees beforehand and identify the people you want to meet. **Business communication coach Patrick Donadio** recommends introducing yourself via email ahead of the event. (“I read your book and saw you’re attending the conference. I’d love to learn more about your research.”) For icebreakers, browse social media feeds to find shared interests, and use those to make small talk.

➔ **Keep the focus on others.** “Networking is about building relationships, not selling yourself,” says Pete Mosley, author of *The Art of Shouting Quietly*. Translation:

You don’t need to deliver an elevator pitch. Get the conversation rolling with a casual starter (“What did you think of that presentation?”), ask more open-ended questions, and let the other person do most of the talking.

➔ **Bring a wingman.** Hesitant to approach people? Get a more outgoing co-worker to join you at the event and strike up conversations with people, then bring you into the talk. Just avoid clinging too closely or you’ll defeat the purpose, Mosley says.

➔ **Exit strategically.** **Close a conversation by setting a time to meet in the future.** (“It was great talking with you. I’d love to get together soon for lunch to continue our conversation.”) **Don’t forget to exchange business cards, and take short notes on the back about your talk so that you can send a meaningful follow-up email,** says Donadio. **If the person doesn’t have a card, ask to connect on LinkedIn.** **M**