

Networking Tips for Introverts

Effectively building - and leveraging - a network of professional contacts is essential to your ultimate success. But if glad-handing isn't your style, networking can look like a high hurdle. The good news: There are several ways to make effective networking more comfortable.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, a widely used personality test, defines people according to where they get their energy on the extrovert-introvert scale. Typically, extroverts get theirs from interaction with other people and taking initiative in work and personal situations, while introverts tend to get energy from thoughts, memories, and feelings.

Conventional wisdom says extroverts jump into networking easily. However, the reality is that introverts are often more successful because they prepare so well. Extroverts are often so used to "winging it," that they often don't develop good contacts and good information.

If you're an introvert, here are some tips to improve your networking:

- Don't try to become a master networker overnight. Instead, take baby steps. If networking hasn't been a regular part of your life, take it slowly and build confidence.
- Don't assume you're bothering people. Most will be glad to hear from you based on a mutual contact, friend or colleague.
- Rely on your supporters. Network first with mentors, close colleagues, and friends.
- Remember all the times when you have been successful in other group endeavors.
- Try to take a colleague, friend or manager to meetings or conferences so you'll know at least one person there.
- Don't underestimate the power of listening. It is a valuable and appreciated talent.
- Make the most of what you know. Take the time to read an industry newsletter in advance of attending a business/social event or in preparation for an informational interview with a contact, so that you will be comfortable sharing the tidbits you have learned.
- Develop a well-crafted pitch, focused on your goal and what you bring to the table.
- Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse. Many people get tongue-tied when meeting someone new, so practice what you plan to say.
- If you have news or a problem to solve, try picking up the phone and telling someone else about it.
- Attend events that have a purpose. If you're uncomfortable at gatherings set up solely for networking, try to attend those that have a purpose - listening to a speaker, for example - since they tend to have a planned agenda.
- Reach out as often as you can, by picking up the phone or sending an e-mail.
- Try to get out of the office. It helps to get away from your desk, get out of your comfort zone, and walk around. Almost all encounters are worthwhile.