

Top 10 Conference Networking Tips

- By [Scott Allen](#), About.com Guide to Entrepreneurs since 2002

One of the main reasons that people site for attending a conference is the networking opportunities. Yet they often leave the event feeling they made few or no connections. Here are 10 Tips to help you get the most out of connecting with others at a conference:

1. Have a plan. Know in advance whom you want to meet (directly or the type of people), which speakers you want to hear, and what tradeshow booths you want to visit.

2. Set appointments in advance. If you know that there will be people in attendance whom you know that you would like to see, call or email a few weeks in advance to schedule a time to meet for coffee, a meal, or a drink. Do not hope to "run into them", as your paths might not cross at a time when you can spend quality time together.

3. Do not focus on meeting the celebrity speakers. While meeting famous authors, speakers, and other gurus is fun, you are one of hundreds who will come up to them and shove a card in their hands. Instead, place your focus on meeting other people in attendance at the event. It is the other attendees who you are most likely to bond with and create real long lasting mutually beneficial friendships.

4. Talk to the people sitting next to you. When you walk into a seminar, take the time before the presentation begins to say hello to the people seated around you. I call this the "power of hello". Once you have said something as simple as "hello", it will be easier to talk with them later in the week if you see them again.

5. Ask questions of people you meet. Never lead with your "elevator pitch". People are more interested in themselves than they are in you, so ask them questions to help them get to talking.

6. Put your technology away. Do not run to your phone, BlackBerry, or laptop at every break. When you are working on electronics you send the message that you are unapproachable because you are busy. Utilize the time on breaks to converse with others.

7. Do not automatically send a LinkedIn or Facebook request. So often people immediately send social networking link requests to people they just met. However, different people have different policies about whom they link with. If they believe in only connecting with those whom they have established relationships, you make it awkward if you send them a link too early (which they then ignore). Best is to ask people if they would welcome such a link at this time. Be respectful of the fact that they might use social networking differently than you do.

Immediately following them on Twitter is okay, as Twitter does not require a mutual connection acceptance.

8. Read their stuff. Many people are active bloggers, twitterers, authors, etc... If people create the written word, seek out their work and read it. It is a great way to get to know people by reading their stuff, but they will also be honored when you tell them that you read their blog or follow them on Twitter.

9. Introduce others. When you meet cool people, be the conduit who connects them with others who might be beneficial to them. This includes others at the conference, as well as other people you might know back home. If you ask the right types of questions, you will easily spot connections that can help others. Don't ever worry about "what's in it for me", but instead just be the person who helps others. You will over time that others will help you too.

10. Follow up. If you meet interesting people and you never follow up, it makes no difference. Own the follow up after you meet people and send them an email (or better yet, a handwritten note) telling them how much you enjoyed talking with them, and plan for future discussions.