

## In-Person Networking

Face-to-face networking can help you meet new people and build stronger ongoing relationships, in addition to helping you find business leads, and make connections with potential employers and recruiters. Most senior-level executive positions are not publicly advertised, so in many cases, good networkers are in the lead in their search for new opportunities.

In-person networking can help you meet new contacts, but it can also help you develop deeper relationships with key connections. The latter makes it essential for you to include networking in your career management strategy and job search plan opportunities on social media.

## Events

Don't miss out on the networking opportunities provided at conferences, trade shows, meetings, or any other in-person event. When you're attending an event, try to focus on meeting new people and adding strategic contacts to your network. We often go to these events to meet new people and learn new things, but instead end up speaking solely with people we already know, such as our colleagues and customers, or catching up on email in the corner of the room. Are you guilty of either of these networking event faux pas?

Remember, if you plan ahead of time, you can meet anyone in the world at an event. So make sure you regularly attend events, do your research, and strike up a conversation with your target contacts. The rest of this section describes the steps you should take before, during, and after attending an event.

### Define Your Goals

Who are the most advantageous people for you to meet? What do you want to learn? If your overall networking goals are to expand your network, you should be focused on meeting new people. If you have business contacts or social media contacts that you need to meet with, have you figured out when and where this will happen?

Most events provide a list of attendees, speakers, and/or panelists ahead of time. Look over the list before finalizing your goals to see if there's any specific person you should meet with at the event. You could even try to connect with them beforehand if emails or social media profiles are provided. Even if you don't have more than a name, it makes sense to look them up on LinkedIn. Sometimes looking someone up without sending a connection request can work as an ice breaker. Most people will look up who's viewed their profile out of curiosity.

Have a few goals in mind before going to any kind of event – business or career-focused. This way, you'll be able to better-gauge the value of attending the event vs. the cost (especially if it was a paid event). If you go to an event and don't reach your goals, figure out why and decide how you will fix this before attending your next event. Don't get discouraged – even leaving with two new networking contacts can make attending an event worthwhile.

### Get Prepared

First impressions count, so make sure you choose a suitable outfit for the event. When in doubt, dress as you would for a professional business meeting. If you know it's a more casual event, you should still wear something that fits you properly and makes you look approachable – this is a networking opportunity after all. Never underestimate the influence of a good first impression.

In addition to making sure you look the part, you'll want to think about what you will say to the people you meet at the event. Put together a short 30-second elevator pitch that will quickly let people know what your skills and experience are. If you have people you're planning to meet, think about the questions you want to ask and topics you want to discuss with them. There's nothing worse than finding the person you intend to meet, but having nothing to say to them.

Lastly, make sure you're informed by researching the latest news or trends related to the event. Making yourself knowledgeable on the latest developments and news will make you seem well-informed, which could impress other industry experts in attendance. If you seem highly knowledgeable about your industry or whichever topic the event relates to, others will decide that you're a contact worth connecting with further after the event.

### **Meet Event Organizers**

Organizers of conferences and other networking meetings are usually well-connected, so it can be beneficial to add them to your network. Before each event, get in touch with the organizers to thank them in advance. This is also a good time to introduce yourself and offer to help in any way they might need (remember being helpful brings people into your network). By doing this, you'll make yourself stand out and the event organizers will be more interested in connecting you with other important people attending the event, particularly those you have on your contacts of interest list.

### **Be the Early Bird and the Night Owl**

Optimal networking occurs at the beginning and end of an event. This is mostly because the early and leftover attendees will be less distracted by other contacts they intend to meet, food/beverages, or event programming. It's also easier to look for contacts of interest when the room is less crowded. In many cases, the end of an event is also one of the best times to speak with presenters, panelists, and organizers. They will be glad the event is over and ready to hear compliments about how well the event went. Many attendees, panelists, and organizers may even want to go out to dinner or for a nightcap after the event, so staying until the end can ensure that you don't miss out on this kind of opportunity.

### **Make a Connection**

People like talking about things that interest them, so try to find out what interests the person you're talking to by using small talk. This can start off by focusing on their commute over, where they're from, or the weather, and then progress to something more personal, such as a common interest in football or a love of dogs. Don't discount the impact this kind of connection will make – at an event all about a specific industry, it could be refreshing to talk about a different topic for a few minutes before moving into straight business talk. Plus, it will make you more memorable later when you follow up with this new connection after the event.

Asking questions is another good way to connect with people at events. Most people like to talk about themselves and what's going on with their business. Asking questions related to their business can also help you decide if this person is a good contact for you to add to your network. Ask something like "What are some of the biggest challenges your company is facing this quarter?" This kind of question can also help you learn about potential needs that you could fill at the company. People usually try to work the room at networking events, so this could be a good way to get right to the point without appearing to be rude. On the contrary, it's a quick and easy way to make a connection and then set up another time to follow up with that person later.

Before you leave or after each successful conversation, ask your new contact how he or she prefers to stay in touch. Some executives prefer a phone call over email; others would rather connect on social media networks such as LinkedIn.

### Exchange Business Cards and Take Notes

Exchanging contact information will be essential to your follow-up strategy. After talking to a new contact, you should also jot down a few notes on the back of their business card or in your phone so that you can write a personalized follow-up message later. It will also help you remember if either of you had promised a specific action item for later, such as a coffee meeting or to send over an article that was discussed.

Some executives believe that it's necessary to hand out as many business cards as possible at networking events. This is likely not the best use of your time. Provide your business card when someone asks for it, but remember it's more important for you to get business cards and information from key and new contacts that fit your networking goals. This will allow you to continue to network with these key people long after the event has ended.

### Don't Forget to Follow Up

After a networking event, follow up with the people you're interested in connecting with further. Keep your networking leads warm by following up right away while you both still remember the conversation you had. Following up promptly will allow you to get the most out of attending networking events.

With the information you've noted on their business card, you should be able to write a personalized message and offer up some additional information that they might benefit from, such as articles, webinars, or names of contacts that could help them reach the goals they expressed during your original conversation. Add these new contacts to your list of networking connections and make a note to follow up with them again to keep the connection going in a few months. Adding a reminder to your calendar could also help you remember to follow up with each connection at the right time.

In addition to connecting via email (if that was his or her preferred contact method), this is an excellent opportunity to leverage social media. Find your contact on LinkedIn and your other primary professional social networking platforms and send them a personal message and continue to stay in touch there by interacting (liking, sharing, commenting) with their posts every so often as well.

## Where to Meet New Contacts In-Person

- Start an event or initiative
- Events and groups associated with your industry and/or function
- Personal interest groups
- Community events
- Family events
- Your children's' events
- Parties
- Your neighbors

---

This article was provided by BlueSteps. BlueSteps is the executive career management service of the Association of Executive Search Consultants (AESC). Boyden is a member of AESC. AESC's [BlueSteps](#) helps 100,000+ executives manage their careers, track their goals and elevate their visibility to the right search firms. [Get started >](#)

[Click](#) here to view the entire Ultimate Executive Career Guide Series.