



## THE ART OF NETWORKING

It's said that more people are afraid of speaking to someone they don't know than of swimming with sharks. How are some individuals able to flow through a room, gathering useful contacts and getting introduced to the right people? And others hang about the coffee stand and leave early? Networking is such a vital skill that it's a pity it's not taught at school. Attending an event with 15,000 other people can be daunting if you don't know who you should be talking to or how to make a good impression.

The basic principals are straightforward and, like many things, practice does make perfect. It's true to say that some people are naturals. But everyone has what it takes to be remembered. For more and more people each year, forum3 is the place to make connections that can help change their career. Two full days of opportunity. But it's a busy place and having some networking skills up your sleeve will help you get the best out of the event. Here are forum3's top tips for networking:

1. **Be prepared** - think about what you want to get out of the event you're attending. Who do you want to meet? Which not-for-profit organisation would you like to learn more about? Check out the list of exhibitors and make a note of anyone you want to see. If you don't have time to do this before you arrive, spend your first five minutes reviewing the show guide and highlighting key names. The best networkers use their time wisely and map out a route around the exhibition to get their networking done in the most efficient way.
2. **Plan your intro** - you'll be expected to say who you are and what you are looking for many times during the event so make sure you're ready. The beginning of a conversation is when you are most nervous but it's when you can make the biggest impression. Rehearse your 'hello'. What type of work are you in and what are you looking for? What's your 60 second pitch that will sum you up when people ask? Too often people in conversations ask, "How can I help you?" and no immediate answer comes to mind.
3. **The small print** - if you are taking a CV make sure it is up to date and sings your praises. Ensure the contact name and email is on every page. If you have a business card, then don't forget to hand it out. If you haven't been at work for a while, or you are looking for a first job, then take along a summary of your skills and your contact details.
4. **Bag the information** - if you are attending an event to gather literature and business cards then make sure you have somewhere to put them. Take a pen so that you can add notes to the information you are given. It'll help you remember who you met and what might be the next steps. If you are given lots of material then be organised about where you are keeping everything. There's nothing worse than finding you've lost that important person's card but have collected a mountain of unnecessary bumph.

5. **Dress the part** - wear something that is comfortable enough to walk around for a few hours but shows you in the best light. Exhibitors are unlikely to take you seriously if you turn up in battered jeans, mucky t-shirt and muddy trainers. People make judgements quickly and that first impression can be helped by you looking professional and confident.
6. **Be yourself** - real networking is about being genuine and authentic. There's no point putting on a façade or trying to be something you're not. Every meeting is a chance to start a relationship. Have confidence in yourself and be honest about your experience and motivation. forum3 is a wide and diverse meeting place and there are opportunities for a great variety of people with a range of skills.
7. **Ask questions** - this is your chance to find out information that could help you change your life. If you think you won't remember everything then write down some key questions in advance. It's your opportunity to make a judgement on the prospective employers and voluntary organisers too. Compare answers to your questions after the event when you have more time to think.
8. **Sing about your achievements** - if it's a crowded networking venue then you need to make an impression quickly. When asked about your job or skills talk about what you've achieved not just what the tasks were. It'll make you stand out from everyone else. It also gives the person you meet an interesting topic to start a conversation.
9. **Who you talk to** - it's not just the people on the stands that have something to teach you. Everyone at forum3 has a shared interest in not-for-profit. Exchanging email addresses with someone you meet in a seminar or at the sandwich queue can be beneficial. If you're visiting the event on your own, it's always easier to approach someone else who is also on their own. They might have been waiting to talk to someone for a while and be relieved that you have broken the ice.
10. **Cover the ground** - don't get hung up in one place and fail to see opportunities around the next corner. Keep an eye on the time and don't be afraid to break off the conversation to move on. Be friendly - you can always follow up later.
11. **Follow up** - prepare time the next day or week to follow up with the people you met. An email to thank someone for their time helps them remember you and gives you the opportunity to tell a future employer something you forgot to mention when you chatted face to face. There's a Hollywood rumour that Tom Cruise sends an email to everyone he meets. It's a great way to ensure that they have your email address even if they've lost your card or CV. Your exhibition experience doesn't end when you walk out the doors. If you've come across anything new then look into it. Follow up any contacts you made. Stay in touch. Exhibitors will talk to hundreds of people during the event, so you may need to remind them how keen you are.

Even the most confident people can be frightened when in a formal networking situation. It's easy to drift through an exhibition without speaking to anyone because you don't feel comfortable networking. But it can't really be as scary as swimming with sharks, can it? Use the top tips to help you get started. It gets easier the more times you try. Good luck.