



Box 21148  
665 8 Street SW  
Calgary AB, T2P 4H5  
Canada

Creating success through understanding

## Tips and Tricks for Networking Success

(or what I've learned by organizing networking events for women)

by Sarah Elaine Eaton, MA

“Networking” is a word that can cause some people to recoil in distaste. We’ve all been approached by the “hard sales” types who flash you a perfect smile and immediately launch into a sales pitch about whatever it is they want you to buy. Unfortunately, this is the image that some people have of networking.

But good networking is exactly the opposite of a sales pitch. Networking is about making valuable professional connections that can grow over time. In order for that to happen, you must be a valuable contact, too.

In 2002, my friend and colleague, Alia Azim, and I started to organize networking events for women. Since then, I have co-hosted or organized numerous business networking sessions. Through that process, I’ve had the opportunity to see networking in action. Here are some things I’ve learned:

- Think of a networking session as a chance to meet new friends. Some people get nervous at the thought of having to meet new people, or stand up in a crowd and introduce themselves. For some, simply being in a room full of new people can be nerve-racking. Smile, relax and be yourself. People will be drawn to you automatically.
- It is absolutely appropriate to simply walk up to someone, smile, offer your hand and say, “Hello, my name is . . .” You are there to meet people, and they are there to meet you. If you see someone standing or sitting alone, go ahead and introduce yourself. If that’s too intimidating for you, a big smile and a simple, “Hello!” is a great start.
- The “golden rule” applies in networking: “Do unto others, as you’d have them do unto you.” If you wouldn’t like an overbearing sales person nagging you at an event, then think twice before you bombard others with a sales pitch of your own. If you remember one thing about networking, remember this: networking does *not* equal giving a sales pitch. If you push people with sales pitches, you may push them away from you forever.
- Asking questions is a great way to get to know people—and to start a conversation. Find out what they do, why they like it, what got them into their line of work, how long they’ve done it and so on. The more you find out about the other person, the more likely you are to remember them and make a real connection. There’s nothing worse than going home with a fistful of business cards at the end of the night, only to discover that you can’t remember who anyone is. Re-

+1.403.244.9015  
[www.eatonintl.com](http://www.eatonintl.com)

member to smile periodically, keep good eye contact and be sincerely interested in getting to know that person. You may not be able to meet everyone at the event, but making a few key contacts can be invaluable in the long run.

- Listen, listen, listen! Of course you'll have to do some talking yourself, as people will want to get to know you, too. When others are talking, do your best to be a sponge and soak in everything that you're hearing. Be sincere, relaxed and alert. You will be thankful later on when you remember key points about the people you've met.
- As you give, so you shall receive. When you meet someone new in a networking or business situation, a great tactic for making a connection with a person is to give them something they need. Perhaps it's the name of a valuable contact or the title of a great reference book, or even a recommendation for an excellent restaurant to entertain clients. Ask yourself how you can be of service and help each person that you meet. In return, people will appreciate your efforts, remember you, and they will want to give you something in return—if not now, then in the future.
- Follow-up is key. If you say you'll call, go for coffee or follow up in any way, then make it a priority to do so as soon as possible. If you need to write it down in order to remember to do it, go ahead and say, "I'm going to write this down so I don't forget."

One woman who attended one of our sessions told me she'd had a great conversation with a new contact. Right then, they arranged to go for coffee to talk about their businesses in more detail. They chose the place and the time. The other person never showed up. The first woman contacted her to find out what had happened and she apologized, saying that she had forgotten. They re-scheduled... and the contact stood her up again! What kind of impression did this person leave? Would you want to do business with her? Certainly not! If you make plans to follow up, keep your promises. Excellent follow-up paves the way to excellent rapport.

- A networking or business event is only the beginning. This is your chance to meet people, help others, and possibly make some follow-up plans. If you make excellent connections, stay in touch with them. A monthly phone call or e-mail just to say hello is a great way to stay in touch. If you have time for coffee and personal visits, that's even better. Not everyone will be an excellent contact for you, but those who are valuable are worth your time.

I hope these tips and tricks are useful to you and your business. Anyone can learn how to network well. It's both a skill and a process. Most of us take time to polish our networking skills. The best way to do this is practice, practice, practice. Go to business events on a regular basis. That way, people will remember you. They'll chat with you often and eventually, they may look forward to seeing you, too! Being a great contact for others is the perfect way to gain great contacts for yourself.

*Copyright © 2003 by Sarah Elaine Eaton. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.  
Contact the author at [SarahEaton@eatonintl.com](mailto:SarahEaton@eatonintl.com).*