



# 5-MINUTE NETWORKING PLAN

The goal of networking is finding others to do business with. Many people find networking events challenging—even extroverts! Online forums and social media can help, but there is still a need for face-to-face conversations and live social gatherings. How can we effectively navigate networking events?

Some people love talking with strangers, getting to know them, and learning about their work and business. Others know they should network, but the thought of walking into a room full of strangers and making small talk makes a root canal sound like a better way to spend the afternoon. Even for extroverts, networking can be challenging.

Here are some ways to make the most of networking events.

**1. Prepare in advance.** Have a focused plan. Is there a particular person you want to meet? A particular client profile you are looking for? Be clear about why you are attending a function.

**2. Look the part.** Don't think you can stop by a business networking event after playing softball without changing clothes. Look like the professional you are.

**3. Bring a pen, and use it.** When you meet someone and exchange cards (yes, people still use actual business cards) write down on their card where you met them and what you're going to do to follow up. We all have piles of business cards that we don't know what to do with because we didn't make notes at the time.

**4. Bring business cards.** Make your business cards stand out. I have a friend in real estate who specializes in properties for older people, and part of her card is a magnifying glass. No one throws away her card, and it instantly brands her.

**5. Network with a friend.** Go to the event with a trusted friend. Introduce and promote each other. It's easier for people to believe other people talking about how great you are than you telling people how great you are.

*Here's the difference:*

"Hi Jane! I'm John Doe and I am an AMAZING insurance agent! You can trust me to do what is right for YOUR family because, even though I just met you, I really care about you!"

*Versus:*

"Hi! Nice to meet you! Have you met John Doe? John is my insurance agent and he's amazing at assessing what I needed. Insurance can be really complicated and expensive if you don't have the right agent watching out for you. I totally trust him to figure out what I need. John, do you have a card you can give to Jane?"

**6. Focus on others.** It's really easy to slid into our own elevator speech, hoping that the other person finds us fascinating and wants to work with us. What works even better is focusing on the other person. Great networkers know that people like talking about themselves, so ask questions and listen for answers.

**7. Smile.** It sounds basic, but many people allow anxiety and their surroundings to make them tense. Smile when talking with others. Be happy to see them and to listen.

**8. Mingle.** People are at a networking event to network, so don't get trapped into just talking with your friends or just one person.

**9. Say thank you for their time.** As you move to another group of people, thank the group you are leaving.

**10. Schedule time to follow up.** You got dressed, you went to the event, and you made some good contacts. FOLLOW UP! Most people don't. If you go to all of the trouble to go to the event and don't follow up, then you wasted your time and theirs. Schedule time during the day or two afterwards to follow up.