

Networking events

Transcript

Sometimes I'm asked about how to deal with networking/formal networking events. You might be going to a meeting, and then there's a cocktail or hors d'oeuvres pieces added to it. Or, you know, there's going to be a big break at a conference and with lunch you're expected to, you know, chat with people at the lunch.

Do your homework ahead of time. Look at the attendee list and see if there are particular people that you know or people representing companies or organizations of interest. So that you can try to seek them out when these opportunities come up. So let's say it is an hors d'oeuvres/cocktails thing, and there's small tables, and you go into this rather large room, and everybody's going to be standing. The first thing is you're going to be doing is juggling food and drink, which is difficult. On the drink side, I hope it goes without saying but - here I go saying it anyway - make sure that you don't drink a lot. Probably just one drink and nurse it for a good period. You want to make sure you have your wits about you at all times.

I find that talking to someone who is also alone and maybe feeling daunted by the whole experience as you are is a good place to start. Go up to them and look for some common element. You're both at this conference, what is it about? Have you been enjoying the sessions? You just attended a keynote. (We're Canadians, the weather will work in a pinch. But, hopefully, it's not your go to.) Consider what you have in common is a really good thing. If you're interested in two or three people who are already engaged, just sort of sidling up and staying alongside them waiting for a break in the conversation when it makes sense. If you know one of those people who will, you know, welcome you and introduce you, so much the better. Make sure that you have the firm handshake and you're ready at these events with your 30 second self-introduction and you have access to how to prepare one of those. Self-introductions will serve you well at these kinds of events.

One thing not to do at these events: this has happened to me, and I imagine it's happened to all of you before and it really leaves a bad taste in your mouth... At one event I had this person who I didn't know very well come up to me and shook my hand. "Oh, Carrie, it's so good to see you..." All the while doing a, "yeah, what's new with you, Carrie?" [Makes gesture as though she's looking over someone's shoulder instead of making eye contact.] Paying no attention to me whatsoever because he was looking around to see all the way more important people that he should really be speaking to. It was so disingenuous.

Focus on the person that you're with. Keep eye contact and express genuine interest in what they're saying to you. Try to learn something from them and offer something in return.

Now, you might be thinking, "okay then, how do I disengage? I'm with this person, and it's all gone very well, but I do need to move along". Don't do that thing we just talked about, which is very unappealing. Instead, you know, if you do actually have some people that you need to meet say, "You know, I spoke with so-and-so earlier, and we were going to try to connect. I see her now". Or, you know what, a washroom break will always serve you well. "Thanks so much. I really enjoyed meeting you. I will send you that article that we talked about. Thanks for chatting with me. I really do need to go use the facilities, so I'll catch up with you later."