

CAREER CORNER

BY SIMA DAHL

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Networking Know-how

NETWORKING: For some it's the equivalent of a root canal. Others consider it a necessary evil not unlike housework. And still others seem to get a kick out of it, opting to attend networking events when they could be doing almost anything else.

While it's always been an important skill, savvy networking has become a mandatory proficiency for job seekers and ladder climbers alike. The old adage, "It's not what you know but who you know," has never rung more true than in this age of referral and social networking.

For those who would rather make a dentist appointment than register for a professional mixer, here are five tips to make your next networking event less painful:

1. Set a goal

It's like when you tell yourself that you'll just work out for 15 minutes and then you exercise for almost an hour. Dare yourself to make three new contacts, maybe five. This forces you to practice and I promise you, with practice it does get easier.

2. Be prepared.

At a minimum, bring mints and business cards. Even if you're between jobs or fresh out of school, you need a business card. And bone up on current events in your geography and emerging trends in your industry. For example: "I've been reading a great deal about QR codes lately; are you using them in your marketing mix yet?"

3. Know your pitch.

When you introduce yourself, don't rely on your job title to let people know what you do and why you're special. This is especially important when talking to professionals unfamiliar with marketing lingo. And if you're in transition, by all means say so!

4. Think about the other guy.

If you think you're uncomfortable, just imagine what the person fidgeting across the room is feeling. It is often easier to extend your hand when your mission is putting someone else at ease. Forget about you; find out how you can help your new connection and the rest will come easily.



5. Follow up, pronto.

I try to follow up with new acquaintances within a few days. Depending on our conversation, I may ask to connect on LinkedIn or acknowledge them on Twitter. E-mail works, too, but social networks have the edge because the connection is more enduring.

You may never become a networking ninja, but you can become a natural with a little practice. **m**

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