

# Five tips for business networking at breakfast.

By Kim McGuinness

**You have invested time and money to attend a breakfast function. It makes sense to leverage that investment by business networking. Here are five tips to help you make the most of the opportunity.**



## 1. Be enthusiastic

Call the organiser in advance and offer your services on the day. Maybe you could help with the registration desk, handing out flyers or setting up for the event. Whatever you do, the organiser will be extremely grateful and will remember you. Don't forget that the organiser is the key contact within the network. Further, you will have the opportunity to meet others involved with the event and also be the first guest to arrive!

If you can't help at the event then make sure you arrive early and awake. If that requires a couple of coffees and a run around the block before you arrive then do it. Don't bother attending the event if you are unhappy about being there at an early hour! If you are alert, awake and excited about the event and the company around you then you will genuinely have a good time, will attract great people and your business networking will be effective. Who would you rather meet – a bright, happy and inspiring person with a smile on their face or a gloomy, dreary person propping up the furniture?

## 2. Be real

Everyone knows the avid "networker" who rushes from person to person at an event blindly shoving cards into the hands of terrified guests. They have hardly had the time to utter "Hi, my name is Joe, here is my card" before they are on to the next victim! A true master networker is interested in the person they meet, not what the person can do for them or buy from them. It is only when you understand the person you are speaking to and where they fit in their world that the business networking opportunities between the two of you manifest.

It is much better to make two or three quality contacts than collect twenty business cards and follow up later. For starters, the "cards" you follow up with will be too busy to give you the time of day, won't remember who you are and will throw anything you send them straight in the bin. On the other hand if you are genuinely interested in meeting the person you are speaking to, and interested in hearing what they have to say then the relationship stands a much greater chance.

A note of warning here – genuine interest is never contrived. If you really don't like meeting people you have two choices – either don't network or start training yourself by trying to see something positive in every person. Truly listen to people and their stories, you will be amazed how interesting they can be when given the chance to shine!

## 3. Maximise your business networking opportunities

Where are the business networking opportunities at the event you are attending? Most breakfast events have different "stages" where it is appropriate to move on

and meet some different people. For each stage you can spend a good 20 minutes or so getting to know someone and have time to arrange a future coffee and then politely move on to the next stage. For example, pre-event coffee in the foyer where you can speak to various guests or seated at the breakfast table where you can meet an entire table of inspiring new people.

Listen, listen and then listen some more! Treat everyone you meet with respect and integrity. Listen to the conversation and focus completely on that person. You may think that the person you are speaking with is not appropriate for your business and cannot give you anything, but who knows who that person will meet in the coming months, or who they are married to, related to, or work with? Every contact is valuable and should be treated as such. At the very least you may unearth a great person who is wonderful company!

#### **4. Follow up**

All too often we go to a business networking event, meet great people, collect lots of cards and store them neatly in a drawer to gather dust. Organise your existing and new contacts and get in touch with the people you meet who you genuinely like and who inspire you. Don't bother trying to create a fake friendship with someone who rubs you up the wrong way – it really does no-one any favours. Invite your contact to coffee to discuss how you can help each other or invite them to another business networking event.

#### **5. Keep track via a system**

Unless you have a failsafe memory, it is beneficial to have a system for keeping track of where and when you met people as well as a record of conversations and follow up between you. There are many database software programs available which allow you to track all relevant information and comments – try Act!, Access or Filemaker Pro. You can track where you met each person and use this information to look up your contacts and refresh your memory before you go to the next business networking event. If you have been especially diligent about recording details in a comments field, you can make a powerful impression by picking up on conversations where you left off! An organised database is also invaluable when referring your contacts to each other – which everyone appreciates.

Business networking is essential for personal growth, business contacts and referrals – not to mention sanity in an increasingly busy world. Treat business networking as an essential part of your business strategy and not just something you do on the side, if you have time. Choose a couple of networks and, for the greatest benefit, get involved as much as you can. Attend events with a positive attitude and keep an open mind about everyone you meet. Finally, follow your instincts and if someone doesn't feel right just move on without needing to discuss your reasons with anyone else. Remember, what goes around comes around.

#### **Good luck and happy networking!**

**[Kim McGuinness](#)** is founder of Network Central. She is also co-author of Network or Perish. Network Central provides networking and support for businesspeople in most areas of their busy lives. [www.networkcentral.com.au](http://www.networkcentral.com.au)