

“Jingle and Mingle”

How to meet people in a room full of strangers

Networking with people isn't hard. It's a matter of being confident, listening to other people, and putting yourself out there. If you can master that, you'll find that meeting new people is one of the easiest things to do, even for the most introverted of us.

First, remember everyone feels the same:

Think you're the only shy person who has ever existed in history? Not a chance. I'd be willing to bet that nearly everyone else in the room feels the exact same way. They just happened to already know someone. But at one point or another, everyone was in their first ever large group of people. They survived it, so can you. So big breath, walk up to someone new, and...

Smile and make eye contact: Have an open posture and give a firm handshake. Speak clearly and at a good tone. The room is large, others are talking. Music is playing. Make sure you can be heard.

Mentally prepare an “elevator speech” about yourself. Have a few things in mind that you can say, when asked, about yourself, your interests, possible career or college choice, and things you are involved in.

Introduce yourself, ask what they do, or what brought them there, then listen:

Find something in common - Ask them what they do, or what their weekend plans might be. Ask about the holidays and what they might be doing. Find out what interests them and what they are involved in. You can talk about sports or events that everyone has in common.

Then listen to the answer. Let them talk for a while (believe it or not, the more you listen, the more you'll be considered a great conversationalist).

Don't monopolize all their time:

You will meet some great people who could end up having a significant impact on your life. But that doesn't happen all at once. It's okay to talk briefly and move on. You don't need to spend more than 5-10 minutes talking to someone.

Be a connector - help each other out: Introduce each other. If someone is talking and a friend walks up to both of you, stop the conversation and introduce your friend.

Watch grouping: Be careful to not group in your comfort zone. Try to avoid standing or sitting at tables in clusters or groups with other friends or students. Break out and away to make yourself easier to talk to and introduce.

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Non-awkward ways to end networking conversations

To Exit Gracefully

Sometimes, even when you’ve met someone interesting, the time comes when you’re ready to peruse the rest of the event. This is a great time to have a prepared exit strategy. Simple say...

Try: Mr. Jones, it was really a pleasure speaking with you. I'm going to grab another donut (or drink), but if I don't run into you later, I hope to see you at another event soon.

Try: Mr. Jones, it was really great talking with you, but I'm going to say hi my dad's friend (or another name) before we have to leave.

To Connect Later On

When someone you’ve met seems like a valuable contact, make sure you exchange information before you part.

Try: Mrs. Smith, I have to head out right now, but I really enjoyed learning more about your work and would love to reconnect later on.

Try: I had a great time talking with you—hopefully I can see you again when I attend a chamber event.

Try: It was great to meet you and talk this morning. I need to say hello to a few others here, but hopefully we can meet again soon.

Help each other out:

If you see a friend struggling, or being monopolized by someone else, walk up to break up the conversation.

Networking isn’t always smooth sailing, and most of us have at least a few awkward experiences to share. But learning how to start and close conversations is one of the best ways to master this important skill. With any luck, you’ll make some connections, you’ll find some event buddies, and you’ll gain some helpful professional resources