

High Performance (Human) Networking

by Larry Wade, President, SAO



At the top of the list

Networking ranks at the top of every SAO survey when we ask our members why they join. I've noticed that some people and some companies network better than others, and I thought these observations might be of interest to you. If you have additional tips, let me know.

By the way, the other top benefits from a recent poll were Newsletter, Salary Survey, CEO and CIO Forums, all the programs we do, the Industry Directory, insurance benefits and our OregonWorks workforce programs.

Personal networking tips - Preamble

As I watch people network, here are some of the best practices that I've seen.

- Show up on or ahead of time. Get your name tag, get your drink and get positioned in a comfortable spot to meet people. There is little time for the lucky connections to happen if you show up late.
- Make sure your name tag is not hidden by your hair, your coat or your lapel. Consider making and bringing your own quality tag.
- Scan the registration list or the displayed name tags to see who is scheduled to arrive. Identify who you would like to meet and keep your eyes open. Be proactive.
- Review the program handout and familiarize yourself with the speakers and moderator. Introduce yourself to as many as you can find. If you have a perspective on the topic, share it with them. Let them know what your questions might be so they can get a head start thinking about the answers.
- Rotate around the room during the social hour. Don't get trapped in dead end conversations. Excuse yourself politely.
- Bring a good supply of current business cards, and have them out and ready to exchange. If information is wrong on them, have the corrections already written in rather than taking the time to do it during the conversation.
- Be direct with people you don't know. Introduce yourself, state succinctly what you do and whether you have any specific issues you are working on.

Personal networking tips – During a program

- Consider your conversation partner in the few minutes before you need to sit down. Most likely this is the person you will sit next to – is this what you want? If not, take control and move around.
- If you are sitting at a table, take the step of introducing yourself to everyone there very early in the process. Get up, shake their hands, look them in the eye, read their name tags, and exchange cards if it seems appropriate.
- During any meal, try to converse with as many people as possible, not just to your neighbor.
- Move outside your comfort zone and avoid sitting with people from your company, or even with people you know well.
- Prepare really good questions for the Q&A period and ask one early. Introduce yourself simply when asking the question, such as, “I’m Joe Smith from Foobar Company and I would like to ask all the panelists to speak to the subject of ...”.
- Hang around after the meeting and try to meet more people. Hang around the panelist or speaker and glean what you can.
- Use the time walking to your car for interchange. Consider commuting with someone you want to know better.

Company Networking Tips

Some companies are better at networking than others; here are some best practices that I’ve seen.

- Get the word out in your company or group so the most appropriate people attend.
- Encourage attendees to read the tips above.
- If more than one person from your company attends, don’t hang out together. Maximize your company exposure by sitting at different tables.
- Invest in quality name tags for your employees that reinforce your company image. Invest in logo shirts, if appropriate.
- Make sure your employees have ample business cards.
- Consider sponsoring a program for added company visibility, and make sure the MC knows attendees are present so they can be introduced. If sponsoring, take advantage of a display table, and staff it.
- Consider volunteering your company facility to host a planning meeting or a small program. Show off your facility when the time comes.

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Abstract: Human networking is a fine art, some people and some companies are better at it than others. Here are some tips and observations on best practices.