**Commandments of Business Networking**

**Networking at Events**

There are various aspects of this type of business networking, from preparation to follow up and everything in between:

1. **Identify where you should go**. All venues are not right for all people. You owe it to yourself to do your research and find the venues that make sense for your business.
2. **Make a decision about which organizations.** Decide the ones you should join and the ones you don’t have to join in order to gain value from the [events](https://smallbiztrends.com/events). For example, does it make sense to join a local [chamber of commerce](http://www.chamberofcommerce.com/), or just go to the events that sound interesting and will most likely include people you should meet?
3. **Register for the event and schedule it like a business meeting**. Many people either don’t sign up for events or sign up for them and then forget to go.
4. **Determine how often you should be networking.** How many times should you network in a given week, month or quarter? This will help you narrow down where you should be going.
5. **Develop open-ended questions.** You can use these to ignite a conversation. Try to find unique questions. Don’t ask the same old “so what do you do” question if you can help it.
6. **Attend events with a plan.** Always try to learn something new. This will keep you from talking too much about yourself and your business.
7. **Prepare yourself physically and mentally for the event.**Dress appropriately. Bring business cards. Turn your phone off or set it to vibrate. (I’m not kidding!)
8. **Don’t forget to mingle**. Are you going with someone? If so, split up once you get to the event.
9. **Get the lay of the land**. When you arrive, step to the side. Take a deep breath and scan the room. This will give you a chance to regroup and focus before you approach anyone.
10. **Don’t sit down right away.** Wait until the program begins. If there is no program, you can sit once you’ve connected with someone.
11. **Try to sit with strangers.** This is no time to stick with people you know.
12. **Be a good Samaritan**. Is there someone sitting alone? Go to them and introduce yourself. You’ll be saving their life! They are alone and nervous. You can even take them with you to mix and mingle with others.
13. **Don’t give your business card to everyone you meet**. Rather, give it to anyone who asks you for it.
14. **Do get the business card of everyone you meet**.
15. **Have a firm (but not killer) handshake.** Your handshake is a key indicator of your level of confidence. So think about what your handshake is saying to those you meet.
16. **Be present — always**. When you are talking with someone, look them in the eye and really pay attention to what they are saying. You may learn something about them that tells you whether you can help them. It’s also the only way you’ll determine whether you should continue to get to know them after the event is over.
17. **Don’t look around the room**. And don’t look over someone’s shoulder when you are talking with them. It’s rude. You are letting them know that you aren’t really interested in them.
18. **Don’t take phone calls**. If you are expecting a call or have a situation that may need your attention, let the person you are talking with know there is the possibility you’ll have to excuse yourself.
19. **Take necessary calls in private**. Leave the room and go to a quiet place. It doesn’t make you seem important if you take a call in the room. It makes you seem impolite, silly, rude, arrogant … take your pick!
20. **Disengage politely**. How do you get away from someone politely? There are a couple of tactics. You can tell them you don’t want to monopolize their time. You can tell them you see someone you need to speak with. You can excuse yourself to go to the restroom. You can tell them you’d like to continue meeting people.
21. **Don’t**[**follow up via email**](http://email.about.com/od/emailnetiquette/tp/core_netiquette.htm). The only exception would be if you have been expressly asked to do so.
22. **Do at least send a note**.
23. **Don’t pitch too early**. Quite frankly, don’t “pitch” at all. When you build relationships it will become apparent to you and the other person when it makes sense to do business with each other. Remember, business networking is about relationships – not selling.
24. **Don’t sign people up for your**[**newsletter**](https://smallbiztrends.com/smallbusinesstrends-newsletter). Be sure you get their expressed permission before you put them on any kind of list.
25. **Don’t assume**. Just because you met someone doesn’t give you license to gain a referral from them, use them as a resource, or give them your promotional and sales materials.
26. **Do err**. But make it on the side of good manners and the golden rule.

**Referral Groups**

Referral groups work best for [growing your business](https://smallbiztrends.com/2014/06/best-practices-small-business-operations.html) when you approach them with the idea of what you can provide to the group and its members. Here are some commandments to consider:

1. [**Focus on giving**](http://www.fastcompany.com/3043213/most-creative-people/a-networking-paradigm-shift-focus-on-giving-not-taking). Networkers don’t get referrals until people trust them. And they aren’t trusted until they’ve been giving quality referrals for a while.
2. **Show up regularly and on time**. When you show up late and/or infrequently, you send a message to your fellow group members: you tell them that you only care about yourself because you don’t take the time to learn about their needs. You show them how you deal with business meetings and associates. Why would they trust you with their clients? How can they be sure you’ll treat them well?
3. **Come prepared.** Have a specific list of referral needs. The more specific you can be, the more referrals you’ll receive.
4. **Always ask for what you need**. You are never so busy that you don’t need more prospects in our pipeline. If you don’t ask all the time, you’ll run the risk of getting to a place where you never ask. If you think it may be a couple of weeks before you’ll be able to get to those referrals, just let the members know that. It’s okay to ask when you are forthcoming with information.
5. **Focus on the group**. Once again, be sure you are really listening to the needs of the group members. Don’t play with your phone or answer emails while others are talking. Really listen and think about how you can help them.
6. **Meet with the members individually**. Do this between meetings so you can get to know them better.
7. **Do not prospect among group members**. You’re not targeting your fellow group members when you have your one-on-one meetings with them. You’re simply trying to build connections.
8. **Do not expect to get until you give**.
9. **Do not expect to receive right away**. It takes time to build those relationships with group members so you trust them and they trust you.
10. **Consider the other group members as resources to you and your contacts**. When you know how they do business and you trust them, you can use them as resources when people mention needs those group members can solve. This can elevate you in the eyes of your contacts, prospects and clients.
11. **Do give quality referrals and leads**. I knew a man who would write up a referral and put “Do not use my name” on the sheet. That is not helpful. I’ve also seen a situation where someone gave a referral but called the referee later and said, “Don’t call that person.” That’s not helpful! Don’t give garbage. It’s better to not give at all.
12. **Check with your clients, contacts and associates first**. Are they open to you giving their names and contact information to your group members? One of the worst things that can happen is for you to refer a group member to a client, only to have the client get mad.
13. **Follow up!** If someone gives you a referral, treat it like gold. You want to be sure that you follow up on it right away. Imagine how you’ll make the other person feel if they refer you to someone and you don’t follow up in a timely manner. It won’t make them want to refer you again. It takes time to build relationships with the people in your referral group. Don’t destroy that trust by failing to take a referral seriously.