

21 Foolproof Ways to Network Like a Pro

1. Have at least three goals for your networking event. Think about what you'd like to accomplish — do you want to meet new business prospects? Find a possible investor? Meet a potential mentor? Select the goals that are most appropriate for your career right now.
2. Give yourself a once-over in the mirror before you leave the house. Check your breath and carry mints just in case!
3. Prep your elevator speech. Whether you're looking for employment or to expand your network, it's important to introduce yourself confidently and give a brief overview of your job and company. Practice makes perfect!
4. Make a strong entrance; walk in confidently and with a sense of purpose. Pause briefly once you move past the door and casually look around the room. Make eye contact with another guest and smile as you approach for conversation.
5. Watch for body language so you'll know when to break into a group conversation. Look at the angle of each person's feet: If a person's feet are pointed outward, that's where they are headed next. That's your signal to approach.
6. If two people are deep in conversation and their feet are pointed toward each other, stay clear. They are currently not open to you entering their circle.
7. A good handshake is critical — don't offer a damp fish! Have a firm grip and ensure your hands are not slippery and sweaty. For a business handshake in North America it is customary to pump only two to three times.
8. Smile and look your new contact in the eye throughout the handshake. Stay in the moment (and don't get distracted by the CEO who just walked in).
9. When introducing yourself, always say your first AND last name. Next, ask for the other person's name and follow that up by repeating their name back to them.
10. When making introductions, first state the name of the most honored person. For example: "Melinda Gates, I would like to introduce you to Margaret Page." Then, if possible, add a snippet of information about a topic of common interest to help them connect and pursue a conversation.
11. Keep professionally designed and printed business cards on hand and make them available on request. Better yet, make a point of asking others for their cards — that way, you can follow up rather than wait for them to contact you. Make sure you bring enough cards to your event!
12. Always present your business card in your right hand, or in both hands, and present it so it faces the recipient. This allows them to read it. Research business card etiquette when travelling to foreign countries; you don't want to unintentionally insult your new contacts.

13. When receiving a business card accept the card with two hands. Take a few moments to study the card and make a comment or two about the information before putting it away. The card giver will appreciate it and you will be more likely to remember details about the person. When back at your office, write any pertinent information about the person on the back of the card or in your CRM as soon as possible.
14. If you're in a conversation with people who are badmouthing others, do the reverse. Say positive things instead and always "good mouth" others.
15. Listen well when talking with others. Use your eyes, heart and brain — as well as your ears — to engage in a full conversation. Never look over the person's shoulder to pick out someone "more important." Be sincere and show interest in what they are saying.
16. Hold beverages or food in your left hand, leaving your right hand free to shake hands and accept business cards.
17. Take opportunities to praise people for the contributions they make. Letting them take a bow makes you both feel good!
18. Follow up your networking conversations within a day or two (that's when the card you requested will come into play). Graciously follow through on any agreements you make and do them as soon as is practical.
19. Make a point of regularly connecting with people on your key contact list, even when you aren't requesting something from them. They will feel nurtured by your outreach.
20. Acknowledge what others do and who they are by sending cards, emails or letters. Frequently congratulate those in your networking circle on their ideas and achievements.
21. Always ask people how you can help them accomplish their goals. Get specific details and follow through on your promises. You'll build loyalty and trust every time!