

## Test your networking skills by Heather White

### Testing, testing 1,2,3 ...

Imagine this – you are seeking a business opportunity and at a business event you happen to meet just the right person at just the right moment. Unbeknown to you, this person is looking for a consultant, which is at the forefront of their mind. You start up a conversation that is perfect in tone, subject and energy. At the end of the conversation this person arranges a meeting with you, and within two months you have a new contract at just the right amount of money and autonomy.

Business-to-business networking is about these situations happening all the time, not just every now and then, and in this article I want to focus on **you** getting very good – at getting it very right – most of the time.

What is so exciting about ‘*event*’ networking is that nowhere else in the business world can you find rooms full of ‘*willing*’ business people allowing you time to test new approaches. Meeting new people in a confined area means that we can test our skills and receive instant feedback, moving straight onto the next person to refine our approach.

Let me explain exactly what I mean when I say “test or risk” something at a networking event. When I first started networking I was pretty awful and had zero results. Yes, people thought I was ‘nice’ but nice does not pay the bills – being very good at networking does!

So I watched how professional networkers made an impact. And what I learned and since experienced is that the most important skills to develop are: confidence, rapport and talking to the right people. Of course this begs the questions “how on earth do you become confident and build rapport” especially when personally I was terrified of speaking to important / intelligent / useful / interesting people?

Well, you know the saying “fake it before you make it”? I did – I acted confident. But it took practice – in fact a lot of practice – which I still do today to make sure that I remain the best!

Get good by getting it wrong. What do I mean by getting it wrong? I constantly try new approaches on most things I do, let’s say my 60 second introduction. When I am at an event and I don’t achieve the result I want, I try again on the next person until I do, then repeat until I get it right most of the time.

Don’t forget new people don’t know you are trying a different approach, so they have nothing to judge you by.

How do you gauge feedback? When talking with someone do they switch on / off to your conversation, do you get yes’s / no’s, are the conversations good / bad, do you learn more / less about the other person, does the person take your call the next day / month / year - or never?

So what can you practise?

- Test your communication style
  - change what you normally do and practise how you want to be
- Test new ideas
  - talk to complete strangers about your ideas and build up confidence and fluidity before approaching the person you really want to influence - the more you test your approach, the more natural you become
- Test your body language
  - does your language engage or drive away the other person?
  - learn how you respond to a person and how they respond to you
  - do you make good steady eye contact, or do you wander, or simply look disengaged?
- Test your handshake
  - yes, I do mean this as well – over 80% of people I meet could have a better handshake
- Test your introduction
  - you have a few seconds to gain or lose the contact
- Test the energy you create in people
  - do you switch them on or off?
- Test getting out of your comfort zone
- Test different ways of approaching a group, leaving a group, etc.
- Attend different groups to see which ones work best for you
- Test yourself on your peer group
- Test to see how soon people lose interest in you, and when you get it back again

Love like you have never been hurt and dance like no one is watching – there is only one way to live – play full out and see what may happen.

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