

SIX WAYS TO HACK YOUR NETWORKING NERVES

You stall at the small talk.

You negotiate your way out of networking events.

You hate being sent to industry conferences, because of the dreaded gala dinners where you have to find your table number in a huge ballroom to sit next to people that you don't know.

It's even worse where there's an informal dinner and no seating plan - you have to choose a place to sit down and it seems all the tables of people you know are already taken!

Any of these things sound familiar?

If networking events strike horror into your heart, I understand. I'm going to share with you the things that I've learned over the last 35 years to make networking bearable, in fact, enjoyable.

Whether you're the shyest introvert, an ambivert, or the extrovert who isn't sure which questions to ask, this tip sheet is going to make your life easier.

Here are my hacks – honed over many hours!

1. DOUBLE THE DELIGHT

If there's an event that you want to attend but you're an avoider, book two tickets. Take a friend, a colleague or your mentee/mentor. It's much easier when you're not alone, and you get to treat someone to a nice experience with you.



2. EARLY ENTRY

Ensure you arrive early. If you're amongst the first people to walk in, other guests have no option other than to meet you! Stand near the refreshments table or the registration desk, and people arriving will start to chat with you. You won't be breaking into an existing group or feeling quite so awkward.

3. COVET THE CORNERS

Look at the corners of the room – that's where the quieter, more introverted folks are likely to be. Chances are, they will be in a small group, maybe even alone. Make a beeline for them and introduce yourself. If they look bewildered and nervous, you get to help them feel more comfortable.

4. REHEARSE YOUR REPERTOIRE

Have a set of questions that you can draw on in any situation. These are questions that you have practiced in advance and they come naturally to you. On the next page is a series of questions that you might like to experiment with, particularly for those of you who are stymied by small talk.

5. JUMP FOR JOMO!

It's okay to say "No" sometimes. You can opt for the Joy of Missing Out. You don't have to go to every single networking event. Pick a handful that are going to inspire you. If it's a three-day conference and you spend one night having room service and an early lights-out, you're forgiven.

6. POWER YOUR PURPOSE

Have a purpose for attending a networking event. Master Sales Trainer, Rachel Burke never goes to an event without her goals front of mind. Rachel is a champion networker and enjoys meeting people. Be like Rachel. Have your goals clear before you book for the event. They might go something like this.

- I will meet three new people that I've never met before.
- I will learn one new thing about a colleague, that I'd not known prior.
- I will take away an idea for a collaboration in my industry sector or in my organisation.

These goals help you focus on the sorts of conversations that you want to have, and the individuals that you want to meet.



***Here's a special tip for conference attendance, especially if it's the first time you have attended a conference by yourself.**

- **When you receive the conference pack by e-mail or online, check the delegates list. Make a note of the people on the list that you know, or have liaised with in your industry sector.**
- **Once you have selected them, send an email or a personal message on LinkedIn, to tell them that you will be attending. Ask them what are they most looking forward to at the conference and suggest you catch up on arrival.**
- **This is a chance to practice some of the questions you have added to your toolkit, in your e-mail. You will be surprised how this gets the conversation established.**
- **People appreciate that you have reached out - especially those who might be feeling like you.**
- **When you do this in advance of a conference, you arrive knowing there are already people who will be looking out for you and willing to find you for a coffee.**

To ensure you have something to talk about, turn over the page for a list of interesting questions you can use when talking with people at networking events.

You're welcome!



CAPTURE YOUR CURIOSITY AND SHOW YOU'RE SAVVY

Kath Walters, book coach and renowned Australian journalist, designs questions that aim to inspire, create interest, and generate an outcome.

Kath advises that questions work best when there's a statement of purpose up front and when we seek permission to ask.

When I sought Kath's assistance to enhance my own questioning techniques, she helped me to design questions I could use when networking.

Below, you can find some of the questions I prefer.

- "One of the things I notice at these events is that I want to go beyond the small talk. I find people so interesting. Would it be OK if I asked you a question about yourself?"
- "I'm here to connect with more people, and to meet people I wouldn't usually get to be acquainted with. It doesn't come naturally to me! How about you?"
- "I'm a curious person. Is it OK if I ask you some questions about you?"
- "I can tell I might need some of your expertise. What I know is that it usually takes me a couple of questions to clarify my thoughts. Is it OK if I ask you a couple?"

Here's some space to design questions you will feel comfortable to ask



About Maree McPherson

Maree is a highly experienced professional who believes that impact follows insight. With over 35 years of leadership experience and time as a Chief Executive in a peak body and regional development organisation, ambitious individuals and leading organisations regularly seek Maree's expertise.

Beginning her career in case management with children's services and assisting people with intellectual disabilities, Maree's work now centres on developing organisations into legacies by helping people think deeply and make sense of their discoveries.

Maree's proven strategy for creating clarity that drives certainty helps leaders and teams thrive. She achieves this through executive and organisational coaching, in which she holds postgraduate training. Maree is a Professional Certified Coach and a member of the International Coach Federation.

Her accreditation further underscores Maree's expertise as a practitioner in the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT).

Maree founded her coaching and training company in 2014 and has since authored two books, including Worthy which was short-listed in the Australian Business Book Awards 2022.

Maree received the Medal of the Order of Australia (General Division) in January 2023 for her service to the community through various organisations.



e: hello@mareemcpherson.com.au

w: www.mareemcpherson.com.au

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