

'Tis The Season For Emotionally Intelligent Holiday Networking



5 strategies for emotionally intelligent holiday networking

Job and promotion seekers, sellers, marketers and business developers, recruiters, fundraisers and business leaders, just about everyone is on the prowl during the holidays to build and solidify relationships for the future.

Networking is nothing new. It has always been part of relationships. Sometimes networking is stealthy and subtle. Other times, networking is in-your-face and aggressive. Usually, networking agendas fall somewhere between those two poles. Discovering what works often requires using emotional intelligence.

Holiday Networking and a Cauldron of Emotions

The holiday season is a cauldron of emotions stirred up by the many social circumstances people find themselves in. Job seekers and struggling start-up entrepreneurs will run into people asking the questions 'What do you do for a living' or 'how is the job hunt or 'what is happening with your new business' more during the holidays than any other time of the year.

The time of year also invites financial and emotional pressures that contribute to the possibility of making mistakes during holiday networking. During this time people can experience feelings of hope, good will, joy and anticipation because the new year is around the corner. However, mixed with the good emotions are often feelings of dread, fear, anxiety, shame, depression and desperation to lay the groundwork for a better new year.

But the holidays remain a great time to network and there is nothing wrong with networking so long as it is done correctly. Your tactical approach and how well you manage your emotions during these events make all of the difference.

Emotionally Intelligent Holiday Networking

Many articles have been written about effective holiday networking tactics. These articles touch on the importance of doing your homework, the value of a smile and warm handshake, preparing a short 'pitch', gathering and handing out business cards, making small talk, mingling, asking great questions and knowing when to exit. It is equally important, however, to understand how to pick up on social cues will

interacting.

How to Network With Emotional Intelligence

1. Emotionally prepare yourself: Learn how to manage and control your emotions before you network. Practice networking. Rehearse some useful techniques.

- As silly as it may seem, try to imagine scenarios and picture yourself being successful and staying confident. This includes practicing what you are going to say, how you are actually going to approach a person, and how you will feel while carrying out these tasks.
- It can help your focus to take deep breaths (in through your nose, hold for a few seconds, and out through your mouth slowly).
- Focus on posture and body positioning. Standing and sitting with a strong posture can send a signal of confidence to your brain and to the people you are interacting with. Smiling puts your brain in a better place so think about it and then do it!

2. Focus on other people: Take the pressure off yourself. Although you want to be prepared to talk about your 'pitch' always keep in mind the other person.

- Ask questions about the other person, listen to what is said and then ask follow-up questions.
- Make comments such as 'that is interesting' or 'that sounds challenging/fun'.
- Ask questions such as 'how did you accomplish that', 'what is your next challenge', 'what trends do you see' both indicates interest and provides you with insight.

3. Respect the event: Do not lose track of the purpose of the event itself.

- Be aware of event activities and participate in them.
- Do not discuss business right away, discuss the event, and come back to your purpose intermittently.
- Mingle and meet as many people as possible. Keep your ears open for opportunities to introduce people you meet to other people meet during (or after) the event.

4. Enter business conversations gracefully: Generally subtle networking works best at holiday events. Emotional intelligence includes being able to read people and the situation and act appropriately in the moment.

- Keep your networking purpose in mind but determine subtle ways to exchange business information.
- When the time is right to discuss your purpose mention it, if the person expresses interest provide more details.
- Track your time; try to keep discussions about your purpose relatively brief. Do not speak for more than 5 -10 minutes unless the other person shows extreme interest. Keep in mind that the other person may be showing interest to avoid networking at the event. If you are going to spend a lot of time with one person, ensure it is the right person.

5. Follow-up warmly: Most success from networking comes from effective following up.

- Follow-up with a general communication first. Unlike a business-networking event where the primary purpose is business, the purpose of a holiday event is celebration. The first time you follow-up, keep the business references to a minimum. Send a brief email, social networking message, or note, and simply say,

'it was nice to meet you and I look forward to connecting soon'.

- Social networking follow-up. Sending an invitation to connect on LinkedIn with this brief message can be a great tactic. Avoid a personal Facebook request unless the person specifically mentioned it (or you are already connected). Following them or their business on Twitter, Pinterest their business on Facebook or other social networks can also work.
- If the person provide you a specific idea or a lead then follow-up with reference to this. Send a thank you and let him know you will follow-up on his lead and let him know how it goes.

Most importantly, remember to relax and enjoy the experience of holiday networking. Keep the pressure off yourself. In doing so, you will project an image of confidence that might attract people to want to follow-up with you or be glad to hear from you when you follow-up with them.