

# Entering And Exiting Networking Conversations

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For many people (including myself), networking at social and professional events can seem like a very intimidating process. Two of the trickiest parts: How do enter into a networking conversation, and equally important, how do you properly end one?

Starting a conversation can be the most intimidating part of networking. It sets the tone for everything else. How do you determine when a good opportunity has come up to start a conversation?

- Keep an eye out for people who are alone. Not only are they the easiest to start a conversation with, but you might also be helping someone who feels uneasy about the networking situation
- When joining a group conversation, look for people who are positioned to allow people to join. Avoid a closed circle of people. A U-shape invites others to join.

After you identify the person or group you wish to speak with, you need to have a good intro ready:

- Keep it light. Stay away from controversial topics such as religion, politics, etc
- If you are approaching an individual, start with hello and volunteer your name and a handshake. Ask what brings them to the event, or something about them. Get them talking about their background.
- Once you make a connection, resist the urge to launch into your pitch. Ask about what they do and their background, listen and respond to what you're hearing. For more, read "Using Your Elevator Pitch Effectively".
- Approaching a group you may lead with "May I join you?" or "I hope I'm not interrupting, I'm . . ."
- Follow the lead of the group. Don't take over their conversation but listen first to what they are discussing then join in.
- Easy questions for a group include "How do you all know each other?" and "What brings you here tonight?"

Exiting a conversation is just as important. Make sure you leave a good last impression as you step away.

- One way to exit is to introduce the person to someone you know, or to ask them to introduce you to someone you would like to meet. You may say "Oh, there's my friend Ralph. Shall I introduce you?"
- Be mindful of your body language (ie tapping your foot or glancing around) so you don't appear rude
- Even if you are ready to move on, stay engaged with the person until you can make a graceful exit
- If you are having trouble breaking away, you can also suggest you wander towards the refreshments or other attractions in the room
- Before you leave, exchange contact information and establish follow-up

- Thank the person for talking with you
- When exiting a group conversation, you may say “Nice to meet you all, will you please excuse me?”
- If you see someone else you know, consider inviting that person into the group rather than leaving the group to join him or her. Facilitating new connections makes you a helpful networker.

Practice your intro, questions, and exit strategies with friends and family. Like many other things, it gets easier with practice.