

## Networking at Conferences

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### 7 Networking Lessons from a Real-Life Conference

By Liz Lynch

More than 27 million people attend conferences, trade shows, and conventions each year, spending nearly \$30 billion. Why are they so popular? Well, in a finite amount of time, you can accomplish so much that can help you move forward on your most important professional and personal goals. And let's face it, if a goal is important enough, we can't reach it on our own. We'll need information, resources, and the help of other people to get there.

Here are 7 lessons that resonated with me from networking at Mark Victor Hansen's MegaBook event, and that you can use to build high-quality relationships at your next big conference:

**1) The bigger the why, the easier the how.** It's one of the first things said on the stage that morning and one of the first things I cover in my *Conference Success Secrets* audio program ([www.ConferenceSuccessSecrets.com](http://www.ConferenceSuccessSecrets.com)). It's important to have clear goals in general, but especially to clarify your specific objectives for attending any event. This makes it easier to home in on making the right connections and engage in meaningful conversations. Otherwise, your networking efforts will be unfocused and unfruitful.

**2) The best things come to those who ask.** Though it's up to you to take control of your own conference experience, a big part of why you are there is to find experts who can help you reach your goals. Talk openly about your goals and the help you need will find its way to you.

**3) Participate to accelerate.** Every person at MegaBook NY who volunteered when a speaker asked was rewarded. Sometimes they got a prize; other times they got invaluable coaching and feedback from both the speaker and the audience. Don't be afraid to take a risk and put yourself on the spot. In these kinds of situations, you're being set up to succeed, not to fail.

**4) Even industry icons are approachable.** Conferences are great places to connect with those who are otherwise hard to reach. Unless you're trying to meet someone protected by the Secret Service, there's nothing stopping you from approaching a big name and introducing yourself. If you've done your homework and know a little something about them, AND you've formulated a specific question to open with (better than just, "Hey, what's up?"), you'll be well on your way to a meaningful encounter.

**5) Circulate, circulate, circulate.** Unlike bigger conferences where you might move from room to room to hear different speakers during the day, MegaBook was held entirely in one room. Not a bad thing at all, but you end up sitting next to the same folks all day, so each of us needed to be proactive about moving around during breaks and striking up conversations with different people. In fact, one of my neighbors made it a point to sit in different parts of the room before and after lunch, just to make sure she could meet more people. Smart.

**6) It's not how many business cards you give out, it's how many you keep.** Another great point made by one of the speakers. It's cheesy to give someone your business card if they haven't asked for one, so don't pass them around like you're dealing blackjack. Business cards should come out AFTER you've had a conversation with someone, NOT before, and you should always ask for one first.

**7) Share and share alike.** Successful networkers are open and always listen for ways to be helpful. As the people you meet tell you about what they're trying to achieve, share your

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knowledge and offer suggestions. During one break, my friend Beth gave one participant some great partnership ideas for a book that person had just published on children and finances.

Networking at conferences can be very powerful. Not only because of the range and number of people you can meet in one place at one time, but also because of the spirit of collaboration and openness which often surrounds the event. Barriers are lowered, conversations flow, ideas percolate. By understanding how to tap into the natural current of the event and do more than just show up and “wing it,” you’ll reach your goals faster, easier, with a lot less work and a great deal more fun.

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**10 Steps for No-Fail Follow Up**

**By Liz Lynch**

You make a great connection at a conference or networking event, but how comfortable are you reaching out to them later? Do you struggle to come up with a good reason to call, believing (correctly) that dialing just to say "hi" isn't enough, at least at this early stage of the relationship?

Many people have told me: *"I have no problems making connections at the conference, but how do I tap into those contacts when I need them later?"*

To paraphrase a famous quote by Sun Tzu, that "Every battle is won before it's ever fought," I would say that "All follow up is won before you ever pick up the phone." What you do BEFORE the follow up will make the process easy or hard.

Here are 10 steps to make sure your new contacts don't disappear into thin air when you need them:

1. **Direct your initial conversation towards meaningful topics.** At an event where you'll both be mingling with lots of other participants, you have a limited amount of time for conversation. Therefore, don't spend 10 minutes talking about the weather. A little small talk is okay at first to break the ice, but move quickly to topics that move the relationship forward (see #2).
2. **Ask questions to learn more about their goals and professional interests.** After the initial ice breaker, asking a question about the conference is a great way to quickly transition the conversation into a more meaningful direction. Two great examples are: "So, what do you hope to get out of the conference?" Or, "What was the single most important takeaway you got from the conference?" Then you can move on to broader questions about what they do for a living and what their larger goals are.
3. **Establish a reason during the conversation to follow up right after the conference.** It's always easier to make the follow up call or send the follow up email if you know they're expecting it. So, connect with something they said during your conversation that could lead you to send them a recommendation, suggestion, or contact info for someone in your network.
4. **Make sure the reason to follow up is a value-add for them.** Look for a reason to give information that will have value for them, not just something that benefits you. In other words, unless they specifically asked for it, promising to email your sales brochure or your resume doesn't count.
5. **Get a business card so you have complete contact info.** This is much better than jotting down just a name and email address on a napkin because now you'll have several ways to reach them (email, phone, fax, mail). Even if you never intend to send them a fax, it's good to know that you have that option.
6. **Write notes on the back of YOUR business card.** You always hear the advice to write notes on the back of business cards you receive so that you can remember something about the people you talk to. But how about trying the idea in reverse? Writing down

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some notes about who you are and what you will follow up about on the back of YOUR card is a great way to stand out and be remembered.

7. **Follow up within 2 business days.** If the conference ends on Thursday, and you'll be traveling all day Friday, it's okay to wait until you're back in the office on Monday to follow up. However, if you know you won't be back in the office until later in the week, at least send a short email within the 2-day time period to say how much you enjoyed meeting them, and that you'll send the info you promised once you're back from your travels.
8. **Don't ask for too much too soon.** Even if you need something at this very moment, you might hold off asking for it until you've had more back and forth dialogue and built a deeper connection. It all depends on how big your "ask" is. If you're looking for the name of a good real estate agent, that's easy, but if you're looking for an introduction to their CEO or biggest customer, remember that they're putting their professional reputations at stake, which they might not feel comfortable doing for someone they just met for 5 minutes.
9. **Keep using value to connect and re-connect.** You want to keep proving yourself as someone who's worth having in their network. Send more information on areas that are important to them. Offer more help if they ever need it. And the best thing you can do? Send them customers. Not tire kickers who will take up their time with informational sessions, but people who are ready to buy their product or service.
10. **When you're ready to ask, be specific and give context.** Explain what you're looking for and why you thought they would be the best person to help. That shows you've put some deliberate thought into reaching out to them with this specific request, and they'll be more likely to respond.

If you subscribe to the philosophy of networking smarter, not harder, then follow up isn't a numbers game. You don't have to spend time meeting hundreds of new people every year hoping that a handful of them will convert into good contacts. By following these 10 simple steps, you can turn just about any contact you make into a lasting connection.

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