

Concept

an idea
distilled
to its
essential
elements

How to Network

Without Really Trying

By Skip Corsini

A wise man once told me the best time to meet people is when a lot of them are nearby, as in an association membership meeting.

I've found that some association events are poorly attended, not because people don't like the chicken served at the buffet, but because people are "chicken." People don't like to walk into a room full of strangers. And that's normal. Surveys about what people fear most put meeting people at the top of the list. Second is an IRS audit. Third is death.

Here are some tips to help you make the most of the networking meetings you attend.

Eat before you get there. This strategy not only frees your system from processing rubber chicken, but also frees your hands for greeting people and acquiring business cards.

Join the right associations. You want to be part of a group that includes members with strong leadership skills, attracts the right level of decision makers, is in a healthy state of being, and has consistent event schedules.

Get there early. Spend time with the association staff and with the people who set up the event rooms. Undoubtedly, you'll get the inside story on the association and the speaker too.

Greet members as they arrive.

Don't refer excessively to yourself or what you do. And don't expect people to care about you until you show you care about them. Talk with people about what *they* do and about *their* lives and job responsibilities.

At meals, walk around and introduce yourself. Once everyone has sat down for the meal, introduce yourself to each person at your table. Keep your business card in the background until there's an opening.

Hang around. After the event, hang out until the speaker is alone and introduce yourself. Avoid the empty complement and show that you were really listening by asking a question about the presentation. And find out how to get in touch with the speaker for future events.

Meet and thank the staff. The association staff possesses a wealth of information. Use them. Take them to lunch. You never know when they may be able to help you. And, believe me, they remember.

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