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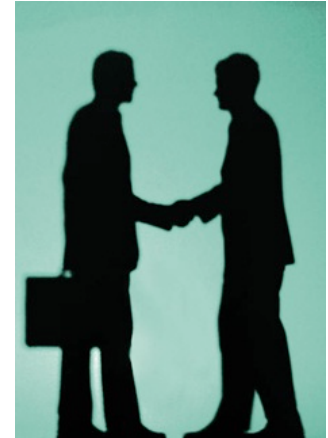
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# 4 Conversations-Starting Tips for Your Next Network Event

[Networking events](#) can be awkward, leaving you with sweaty palms, and little return on your investment of time and energy. But done right, they can connect you with future customers, employees and a sprawling web of vital contacts to help you in a pinch.

Here are four tips to banish your inner wallflower and have great conversations at your next meet and greet.



## 1. Begin With the End in Mind

First things first: it's important to know what you want out of a networking event by defining what success looks like, says Julie Melillo, a New York-based life and business coach who shepherds CEOs and entrepreneurs through the social side of business. "Do you want to leave this networking event with 50 business cards? Do you want to make one lasting friendship? Do you want people to remember you in the future? Getting clear on what reasonable goal you're looking to attain is important," she says. Your answer should inform your interactions for the rest of the event, she says.

## 2. Use a Closer to Open

Conventional wisdom holds that it's best to [start a conversation](#) with an open-ended question—give your conversational partner a chance to talk about herself, the thinking goes.

Not so at networking events, says Melillo. An open-ended question can make another networker feel obligated to speak with you. On the other hand, "asking a close-ended question, 'Oh hi, are you on the committee that runs this event?' allows the other person the freedom to say 'No, sorry,' and leave. Or, 'Yes, I am.'" If the other person seems interested in chatting, then follow up with an open-ended question, Melillo says.

## 3. Comment on Your Surroundings

Don't feel like you have to be all business all the time, says Melillo. A great way to help the conversation along, she says, is to open with a remark on your mutual atmosphere. Melillo advises trying something like: "Wow they really have amazing work at this gallery, don't they?" or "This brie is really good, have you tried it?" After you've posed your opening question, Melillo says, be sure to introduce yourself.

## 4. Relax. Remember, You're Just Talking

Even after giving her clients a few basic tips, Melillo says she always reminds them to relax and enjoy the conversation. "There's a lot of pressure to do it the right way," Melillo says of networking. "When you rely on those rules too much, it can make you feel stifled and unnatural." Here are some [more networking tips](#) to give you confidence.

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