

Networking 101: How To Conquer The Business Cocktail Party

22 days ago by [Meredith Lepore](#) | [Leave a comment](#) | [Share a Tip](#)



“Cocktail party: A gathering held to enable forty people to talk about themselves at the same time. The man who remains after the liquor is gone is the host.”

Comedian **Fred Allen** once made that observation. The cocktail party, especially one that takes place after a conference or is aimed to promote networking between professionals, can be an opportune time for helping your career. “Only 30% of jobs are actually advertised. Most jobs are found through word-of-mouth and networking,” said **Paula Reuben Vieillet**, Nationally Certified Vocational Evaluator and CEO of [Employment Options, Inc.](#)

[Inc.](#)

But if you walk into the room with your goal being just to get 40 cards then you are not properly networking. You are not actually caring about making genuine connections with these people. You just look at them as cards that can get you places. On the other hand, you don’t need to go in there and down shots so you can be life of the party. There is a happy medium between drunk sorority girl and all-business. We spoke with a ton of career and networking experts on the best strategies to use for networking at the cocktail party.

- **Do your research ahead of time:** According to LinkedIn speaker/consultant and author [Wayne Breitbarth](#), if you know the guest list ahead of time, check out the LinkedIn profiles of those who are attending (or find information on them in other places) and look for conversation starters with your biggest targets. Where do they work? Who are their friends? What nonprofits do they love? You can sometimes tell from their group affiliations what their hobbies are. Lead the conversation a bit and go straight to their hot buttons. If you don’t know the guest list ahead of time but see someone you’re dying to meet at the party, log onto LinkedIn from your iPhone and get some insider information.
- **Don’t try to meet everyone:** [Dorothy Tanahill Moran](#) says make a simple goal for networking like meeting three new people that you get to know fairly well during the cocktail party. Doing this helps to make the whole event not as overwhelming as it might otherwise seem. “You don’t want your approach to be “working the room”. When you attempt to work the room, you can end up being too superficial with your interactions and you won’t leave a lasting memory with anyone.”
- **Avoid the “cocktail cluster”:** Most likely you will know a few people at the party. Tanahill Moran says you need to avoid the classic “cocktail cluster” of people who know each other that don’t mingle and meet other people. It is a source of comfort to meet up with people you know but you need to break off from those friends to meet other people you don’t know throughout the course of the party. When you meet a new person, introduce them to a friend. The new person will appreciate your generosity and friendliness. If networking really scares you then find a networking “buddy” to attend events with (but DON’T stick with them the whole time), says **Lisa Thompson**, director of professional services with executive search firm [Pearson Partners International](#).
- **Look for the right time to introduce yourself to someone:** If you’d like to introduce yourself to someone you don’t know, it’s best to wait until that person is not busy or casually roaming, make eye contact, and shake their hands while confidently saying, “Hi, my name is ____”. After the initial introduction, casually make conversation with them about what they do-keep it light. If the conversation organically steers towards the topic of career, that’s great. If not, don’t try to force it. Even if nothing materializes in the present conversation, you never know if this person might be helpful in the future, so treat them as valuable as any other professional in your network. If you do meet a new person that you feel you have a connection with, try to set up a time in the future to meet them for coffee to further develop a relationship. This type of follow up will help reinforce who you are and begin establishing a relationship of mutual support.

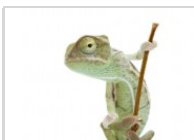
- **Don't make the conversation all business:** According to Manhattan life coach [Julie Melillo](#), "It's okay to discuss your career and even your career goals, but this should be a side-note, and not the main conversation. For example, "I'm Jane, and I have a jewelry business. What do you do?" The wrong way to do it? Blurting out, "Hi, I'm Jane and I have a jewelry business, and I'm looking for people to buy my bracelets — want to see a catalog?" This is a surefire way to generate bad reactions. Another bad example, "Hi, I'm Fred. I just got laid off. Do you know of any jobs?" If someone likes you and can help you in some way, they will find a way to offer that help — avoid being pushy at a social event. People naturally do want to help each other, but not one likes to feel pushed into it. Let people offer their help on their own.
- **Don't be a vulture:** Thompson says don't pounce on people and tie them up in a conversation that is all about you and what you do rather than being interested in who they are and what they do. Also, learn to handle networking vultures and elegantly get out of conversation with someone who wants to stick with you. (Saying there is someone across the room you just have to speak to or have other possible strategies up your sleeve.)
- **Enlist help:** According to Melillo, let your friends talk you up. Also let them drive the conversation towards topics that could help you. Why? When people talk themselves up, it comes across as arrogant. But when a friend or other person talks you up, people take notice. For instance, you can bring a friend who introduces you as "the best chef in Manhattan." Guests are sure to be curious to hear about your cooking skills! But if a person were to say "Hi everyone, I'm the best chef in Manhattan," you'd be met with a crowd of eye rolls. The message is the same, but having a different person deliver it is important. So bring good friends with you who are willing to talk you up. Another example, if you have a friend trying to break into a new career field, and the pair of you meet a new person who works in that field, help you friend by saying, "That career sounds familiar. Mark, is that the same field you're looking to get into?" Then the conversation will certainly go in that direction.
- **Try to exit the conversation in the most non-awkward way possible:** If you feel that you've exhausted conversation topics, a classic and courteous way to move on is by exchanging contact information. Whether it's your email address, LinkedIn profile full name, phone number, or business card, make sure you show your enthusiasm and gratitude for their taking a few minutes to talk to you and your intentions to follow up on your conversation, said [Ritika Trikha](#) with [CareerBliss.com](#).
- **Don't get inebriated:** Yes, alcohol is a social lubricant but this is not the time to drown yourself in it. If it relaxes you a little then great but you could always opt for a non-alcoholic drink like a soda or a virgin something. If everyone else has a drink, you may feel out of place if you aren't holding something.

A few more last-minute tips from Lisa Thompson:

- **Business Cards:** Make sure they are up to date and look professional.
- **Be brief and concise:** Practice describing what you do concisely in just a couple of sentences
- **Dress appropriately for the occasion:** Some networking functions are very formal and others you can get away with more casual. If in doubt, check with the host.
- **Listen more than you talk.** Simple as that.

Photo: [Peter Jilek](#)/Shutterstock.com

Read more related stories



[6 Networking Traps You Must Avoid](#)



[5 Tips for Networking Without Networking](#)



[How to Get a Promotion, Our Take on What not to Say](#)