

2014 Annual Education Conference & Resource Center Exhibition

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Veni, Vidi, Vici

The Anatomy of a Networking Reception

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Networking is a Four(+) Letter Word...

- ...So why not call it something else?
 - Meeting new people
 - Getting free food and drinks
 - Socializing
- Don't psych yourself out before you step up to the hors d'oeuvres-filled plate
- A little forethought and planning make all the difference
 - Review the guest list, if available
 - Consider your desired outcome(s) for the event and set goals

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Pre-Partying Isn't What It Used to Be

- If the event is after work, plan your outfit accordingly
 - Not everyone is business casual so consider the impression you'll make
- Watch what you eat for lunch! Garlic kills more than vampires...
- Always be prepared, even if you weren't a Scout
 - Have clean business cards
 - Remember the purpose of the event and the general audience
 - If you have access to the attendance list beforehand, do your due diligence
 - Remember: You're a human first, professional second

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Demystify the Room

- There are three parts to working a reception, similar to a business letter:
 - Opening
 - Body
 - Conclusion and *graceful exit*
- All three parts are equally important for different reasons, and all take lots of practice

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Act I: The Opening

- Take time to scan the room and check things out (just move out of the doorway!)
- Before approaching anyone, first decide two things:
 - Whom to target
 - What to say
- Pop a breath mint, breathe and smile while scanning

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The Target

- Three types of people in a reception:
 - Floaters**
 - Floaters have no "home" and roam around the room
 - Floaters can be outgoing or reserved
 - Some floaters move between anchors (bar, table, tree)
 - Magnets**
 - Magnets always attract a group of people
 - Typically outgoing
 - Clingers**
 - Clingers remain with one person or group for the entire event

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When in Doubt...

- Go for floaters, the low-hanging fruit
 - Find someone standing alone or looking bored
- Magnets are a dicey proposition—choose wisely
 - They often carry the conversation, which could make things easier
 - They typically have high energy, which can be draining if you're an introvert
- If you or your guest knows someone in the room, use them as your warm-up act BUT
 - Don't become a clinger yourself
 - Don't travel in packs

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Your Book Will Be Judged By Its Cover

- First impressions are hard to change
 - Handshakes!
 - No limp fishes allowed
 - Some people don't shake hands; a nod and smile are perfect substitutes
 - Maintain comfortable eye contact; don't scan the room too much
 - Compliments are a mixed bag...
 - Complimenting someone's appearance can be risky, especially across genders
 - Regardless of gender, watch your tone and facial expressions
 - ...And so are jokes—your sense of humor is not universal
 - Eat and drink wisely

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The Entrée

- Meeting a floater/someone standing alone
 - Open with a commonality—good food, good turnout, etc.
 - Tip: If your organization is an event host or sponsor, you have the right to approach anyone to say "Welcome, thank you for coming."
 - Caution: Some may turn into clingers

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The Entrée cont.

- Meeting a magnet/entering a group
 - Difficult even for advanced networkers
 - Don't attempt without preparation
 - Have a reason for wanting to join that group
 - Lead with something positive to say because the energy will shift accordingly
- If you brought a clinger, facilitate his/her introduction; it will make you look better
 - You'll also have a built-in conversation starter ("I was just talking about [x] with Roya—what do you think about it?")

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Act II: The Body

- Myth: Conversations just *flow*
- Fact: Networking conversations are *managed*
- Your ultimate goal: act interested and be interesting, unique and memorable (in a good way)

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Conversation Starters

- Don't dwell on the most common "go-to" topics
 - Common = forgettable
 - Try not to lead with "What do you do?" or "Where do you work?" You are neither the first nor the last person to ask these questions
 - Ask open-ended questions: "What brought you to tonight's event?" "Is this your first time attending this event?" "What did you think of the speakers/program?" These can take you in more interesting directions
- Have a prepared answer for every question you ask because you'll likely get it in response
- Avoid negative or controversial topics like the plague

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Conversation Starters

- Everyone has one; make yours memorable
 - Think unique brand statement—short and sweet
 - You are a product in the marketplace: why are you unique and why should anyone buy you?
 - People respond well to positive energy and passion, so convey both in your brand statement
- Examples
 - "I help commercial real estate developers stay legal and acquire properties throughout California. Since I'm a CA native, it's a great opportunity to travel around my home state."
 - "I'm a business matchmaker for our lawyers: I help them to locate good teammates across the platform and create beautiful pitch team music together."

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Act III: The Exit

- Challenge yourself! Don't spend all night with the same person or group
- It's okay to mingle; we're all there to meet people
- Leave when the conversation lulls
- Tip: Use someone else's entrance as your exit
 - The break in flow allows you to break out without being disruptive or feeling awkward

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Exit Lines

- Start positive, break the news, end high
 - "It was wonderful speaking with you. I'm going to try to mingle a bit. Nice to meet you!"
 - "It was wonderful meeting you. I'm going to find the ladies room. I enjoyed speaking with you!"
 - Caution: Going to the bar or the bathroom is NOT guaranteed to lose a clinger
 - Always leave with a smile and their business card
 - Cultural tip: Respect the business card
- Clinger exit rules: You are not obligated to take a clinger with you unless that clinger is of strategic importance
 - Ex: your guest for the event, your boss, a new contact at a client/target

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Act IV: The Follow-Up

- Follow up via e-mail or LinkedIn with every person you met within the next few business days
 - In the message, reference something unique or memorable about that person or your conversation
- Stay in touch
 - Email relevant articles once in a while (good rule of thumb: once a quarter)
- If you see a contact at another event, say hello! (And then gracefully exit a few minutes later)

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Resources

- <http://thenetworkingworkshop.com/networking-advice-2/>
- <http://blogs.hbr.org/glickman/2012/12/confessions-of-a-networking-pr.html>
- http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2012/01/the_introverts_guide_to_networ.html
- *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking* by Susan Cain
- *The Introvert's Guide to Success in Business and Leadership* (eBook) by Lisa Petrilli

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