

How to Network When You Don't Like Networking

Written by Jesse Criss and Edited by Michelle Murray-Schlitt

Recently I had the opportunity to go to the Orange Conference in Atlanta and it was fantastic. I love big conferences because not only are they an amazing time away with my teammates, I also get to do something that I love... networking. However, when I got back I was talking with a friend who is on their way to a large conference for their work and he was dreading the networking he would have to do. He said things like:

1. There is always a line
2. I just don't know what to say
3. They don't really want to talk to me
4. Why does this even matter

As we talked it became clear that he **DID NOT LIKE** networking and yet he knows the value that comes from networking. So, for my friend I have decided to write this guide about "How to Network when you don't like networking". To get us started let's first define what I mean by "networking"

NETWORKING DEFINITION

The Webster's dictionary defines networking as *"the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions; specifically: the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business"*¹. This very textbook answer implies the passing of information or services for the purpose of cultivating productivity. Basically, you network with an individual to make a positive productivity point in your relationship or business. To break it down one more level, networking is about making connections that have benefits.

Now the question of what kind of benefits is where some of the debate has been around networking. Is it all business? Does it need to be a positive increase to both parties? How do relationships fit into all of this? These are great questions but I think they distract from the simplicity that I actually think networking is all about. I would define networking as follows.

Networking is the building of relational touch points where there can be an exchange of information, or services. However, without the relational foundation the lasting impact of the network can be in question.

This shifts networking from purely a business activity to one of connection and deeper understanding. I have always found that the more personal relational moments I can have with a person I'm networking with the better quality the connection has. For example, one of my closest friends and mentors Randy has been in my life since I 13 years old. He was a camp speaker and over the years I would take time to chat with him, remind him of the people we knew in common and share stories. One day we ended up in a meeting room together for a project we were both working on and all those little moments over time led to a stronger connection. That connection led to me asking him to be my mentor through one of the hardest seasons of my life. But it all started because I stayed after chapel once at camp to introduce myself to the speaker.

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/networking>

DEALING WITH MAJOR COMMENTS

Now that we have a working definition about what Networking is let's deal with 3 of the 4 comments my friend made to me about networking. These comments are not unique to him, in fact this is often what I hear about networking opportunities and they are in some way's valid. However, I think they are only half of the picture. All three statements can be true BUT that doesn't mean that networking shouldn't happen.

- **There is always a line:** Yes, sometimes this is true BUT I often think waiting in the line is the currency you pay for the time with the person. People are busy in a modern world and people's time is of high value. I have often believed that the wait to talk to someone is equal to the time you are taking up with your question. It doesn't mean if you wait 10min you get 10min, but what it does mean is that to ask your question/s costs you both something, in this case, time. However, over time and multiple encounters your first 10min may pay off a hundred-fold.
- **I just don't know what it say:** This is where most people actually get caught up and I'm going to suggest some things you can say in the second half of this guide. However, for now think about this comment this way, if you say nothing you will get nothing. By that I mean that networking is all about relational touch points. A simple "hi my name is Jesse"... can over time turn into "Randy can you mentor me". Now this does not happen all the time, but if you never say anything you will never get anything.
- **They don't really want to talk to me:** This might be true for a handful of people you meet but it's been my experience that more often than not they actually would really like to talk to you. Every public speaker knows that talking to the crowd is part of the gig, and every public speaker knows that crowd is their bread and butter. They are only a public speaker if the crowd continues to show up. Trust most of the time they want to talk to you because it affirms that the crowd is still listening. The worst feeling is the world is give a big talk and not having anyone come up after and at least say thanks... trust me it's not fun.

Now before we move of to the practical section of this guide let deal with the last comment because it's really the most important one.

Why does this even matter?

We have established what networking is, addressed the major comments about networking but now we need to understand why it's even important. If we go back to our working definition for Networking, **"Networking is the building of relational touch points where there can be an exchange of information, or services. However, without the relational foundation the lasting impact of the network can be in question."** we start to see the answer to the "Why".

For me Networking is all about relationship. We were created for relationship with God and each other. It's hardwired into who we are as people. From the very beginning God designed humanity to be in relationship and it's that desire to build relationships that I actually think fuels activities like Networking.

Yes, I know that you're going to say that, "Relationships are a lot of work" and they are, there is no getting around that fact. To build into people requires work and our most valuable currency... time. However, I think it take more energy and dedication to function in our world as a solo act. Because to do so would push against our very nature and that has a strain and toll on the mind, body and soul.

This is why Networking matters, it meets a core need we have to be in relationships and community with those around us by giving us the direct benefit of sharing ideas and resources that help us in turn build better relationships and deeper communities. To network is to fuel this cycle over and over again.

SO HOW DO I NETWORK WHEN I DON'T LIKE NETWORKING

All of the above now sets us up to answer the main question of this guide, how do I network when I don't like networking? And in order to do that I'm going to split my answers into the three reasons people network.

DISCLAIMER: There is no ONE WAY to do any of this because people are people not projects. We are not all "cookie-cutters" of each other. The people in my world are completely different than the people in your world. So in the BIG theory of it all we can see some patterns and practices but we're painting with a broad brush.

1) Business Networking

Business Networking is what we think of most when we think of networking. This is the creation of relational touch points for the exchange of information or services. Basically, you're hoping to get something from them and in return you are offering something in return. The classic example of this is meeting speakers and vendors at a conference. They are hoping you buy what they are saying or selling and you are hoping to make a connection to an inside track about a particular product or service.

Tips

- Introduce yourself and what you do (they want to meet people to) then ask one of three questions
 - **Q1 - I'm just starting out in _____ and wonder what kind of advice you could offer me as I get started? WHY:** *This question helps put your face and name into their memory*
 - **Q2 - Based on what you said, I was wondering _____ ? WHY:** *This question is a door for more conversation about what they said or what you are offering. This is the question with the best room for immediate follow-up.*
 - **Q3 - Would I be able to get your notes and email you some follow-up questions? WHY:** *This question is all about the long game on connection and relationship. The notes give you something to walk away with and the email information gives you a point of connection. You can also then refer to where and when you met to help bring your face and this conversation to their minds.*
- Respect their time and the others waiting behind you. If you monopolize their time they will remember.
- It is 100% worth waiting in line especially if you plan on attending the conference more than once or you think the odds are high your paths will cross again.
- Never forget the golden rule... "people are people not projects or possessions". Treat businesses networks as people and you will be surprised at the depth and fruit that will come from your contacts.

2) Relational Networking

Relational Networking is what I think of when I'm meeting people in a room for the first time but it's not businesses orientated. A good example of this might be a church BBQ, a block party or

birthday party your kid has been invited to but you don't know any of the other parents. Basically, there is a room full of strangers and you're expected to mingle and meet people.

Tips

- Think of asking questions from the **F.R.O.M²** acronym
 - **Family:** *Can you tell me something about your family?*
 - **Recreation:** *What do you like to do for fun? do you play any sports?*
 - **Occupation:** *Where do you work?*
 - **Memory:** *What was your favourite birthday party growing up as a kid?*
- Then make sure you actually LISTEN to the response. Most people are thinking about the next question while someone is answering their first one. A better strategy would be to listen to what they say, then respond and repeat.
- Try your best not to force the conversation let it be natural
- Do whatever you can to try and remember their names. One tip is to try and use it as your response back to them.

3) Personal Networking

Personal Networking is when we take time to meet people we want to get to know on a more personal level. Typically, these are people that run in our same social circle, clubs, sports teams or parents from our kids' car pool. These are typically people you know already but want to know on a deeper level. This is more than the surface level of **Relational Networking** and the different than the results-based **Business Networking**.

TIPS

- Remember people are people not projects.
- If the goal is depth you need to be willing to be vulnerable first. If you want to go deeper with someone but are unwilling to open up and allow them to go deeper with you this isn't going to work.
- Use what you have in common as a starting block and build on that over time. Basically, start with what you know, and organically build on that over time.
- This type of Networking is about the long game, so be patient and trust the process.

Practice Make Perfect

We have covered the definition of Networking, ***“Networking is the building of relational touch points where there can be an exchange of information, or services. However, without the relational foundation the lasting impact of the network can be in question”***. We have address the major comments people make about Networking. We also look at ways that you can Network in business, relationally and personally but at the end of the day it's all theory unless you actually go out there and NETWORK.

My challenge to you is that over the next 3 weeks you try and make 3 networking connections in the 3 major areas (**Business, Relational** and **Personal**). The goal is not the number, remember people aren't projects, or how well you do. Rather the goal is to get out there and try. The more you try the more comfortable you will be. The more comfortable you are the more you will try and when that next major opportunity comes your way you will be ready.

EXTRA CHALLENGE: I would love to hear your Networking Stories and maybe even post some of them here on Fresh Ministry Consulting. You can email me [HERE](#) and tell me you're Networking Story.

² Eric Liechty, Peer to Peer (Sonlife Classic 2011) E-Book Edition, 11