

BE MY VALENTINE



The assignment: “an essay on the importance of networking for women.” The challenge: up to 650 words for a favorite subject. The opportunity: a chance to toss valentines to some great networking tools and techniques learned from the pros.

Before I jump into this, I’m going to cite my favorite book on resume how to’s: *The Smart Woman’s Guide to Resumes and Job Hunting*, by Adair King and Betsy Sheldon. There’s that pesky woman thing again. Freezing out the men — some of my favorite people in the world. But it’s my favorite resume book, so I tell male clients to use it, too. I’m “not thinking male or female, I’m thinking professional.” That’s a favorite line from *Etiquette International*, www.etiquetteintl.com/tips.htm. Both book and Web site also have networking tips.

But I digress. The thing is, I can’t imagine living without networking. We’ve all done it — asked around to find a great auto mechanic, sought out Facebook friends for a barn animal costume for a Christmas pageant, checked out a surgeon for a sister with cancer, used a book club for ideas on a good beach read, men, health care or political candidates. So moving to the business realm should come naturally. **Networking for business purposes is based on the same simple premise of connecting.** It just takes a mental shift and some practice. In the ultimate

best case, the connection is for mutual gain.

My valentines for business networking best practices:

- ♥ **Find a group.** It might be a Chamber of Commerce committee, a professional association, a board of directors or more generally, the Syracuse WBOC (Women Business Opportunities Connections, www.wboconnection.org) or WPO (Women Presidents’ Organization, www.womenpresidentsorg.com). Some of these have a fee or revenue requirements. All have the expectation that members will show up. **Showing up, in fact, is a key to effective networking.** Sit in a different place every meeting. Talk with different people. You’re there to make connections!
- ♥ **Plan.** Use Google, or some research equivalent, or call ahead for information. Before entering a situation — a Chamber event, a sales call, a board meeting, a job interview — know the players, their organizations and what’s important to them. For instance, WPO members take increasing business and financial success very seriously. Networking is a sidebar to their meetings.
- ♥ **Organize.** Take business cards, a nice pen, a PDA (although do not ever make phone calls or text while we’re talking — a sure way to eliminate any chance of making me feel important or wanting to be with you again.)
- ♥ **Have your 15-second “Me, Inc.” line ready.** Someone is going to ask what you do. Be prepared with an answer that will make the listener(s) think, “Wow, I should spend time with this person.” Getting that line down to 15 compelling seconds is the biggest, hardest job you’ll do in networking. Work on it. Practice it.
- ♥ **Think relationship before results.** Of course you’re looking to accomplish something. But come at someone first with a hard sell instead of a personal and relaxed interest? You’re done. If a new acquaintance thinks you’re genuinely interested in her and offers some value, she’ll look forward to being with you again. **Developing the relationship, both ways, takes time, care and personal touch.**
- ♥ **Be generous.** Keeping track is, frankly, too much trouble. Are you truly someone to count on for your network? Trust me, that reputation will spread. **Your investment in supporting others will return to you many times over.**

Cheers! ☺

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