

13 Tips for Networking at Holiday Parties and Events

by Lisa Rangel | November 15, 2017



The holidays present many opportunities to pursue job opportunities and expand your network. Whether you're an extrovert or introvert, here are several things you can do to make holiday job searching and networking easier and more enjoyable.

1. Enter events thinking, "Who can I help?"

Taking this mindset as opposed to "Ugh, I don't know anyone!" or "What are they going to think of me?" will make you appear more genuine and reduce your stress. Focusing on offering assistance rather than trying to fit in with the crowd will help you a lot.

2. Gravitate towards positive people; stay clear of the "bah-humbug" crowd.

It's imperative to stay positive during the holidays. I'm all for helping people with a pick-me-up. But if you feel like someone is a "Debbie Downer" who's going to bring you down with them, then find someone else to chat with, learn about, and help. This is networking, not therapy. Help someone who wants your help.

3. Do your homework before choosing to attend events.

Does it make sense for you to attend the event? If two events are scheduled for the same time, pick one and use it well. Don't spread yourself too thin. Research who will be attending events to evaluate how they can fulfill your personal or professional goals. Make sure attending serves a purpose for you—even if it's just to have fun.

4. Read *The Fine Art of Small Talk* by Debra Fine.

Not sure what to say or ask when you meet someone new? Choose four to five questions out of this book to help you get a conversation started. Or use it to create some of your own standbys. This will help reduce the awkward silences that can arise. Some of my favorites that get things rolling are: a) How are you connected to this group? What brings you to the event? b) What kind of day did you have today? c) What do you enjoy most about what you do? What do you find most challenging? d) What are your plans for the weekend?

5. Find a buddy to attend the event with you.

This can be very helpful, but only if you don't spend the event chatting with each other; you can do that anytime. Plan to facilitate introductions for each other as you meet people throughout the event.

6. Get there early whenever possible.

It's easy to start conversations with the early crowd. On the other hand, it can be a challenge to enter conversations already started if you're late.

7. Know your story.

Have an eloquent, concise way to describe where you are in life and what you're looking to do in the next phase of your career. Be prepared to explain that you're looking for a new position and the kind of job you seek, when it's appropriate to share.

8. Be curious.

Ask questions and learn about problems and opportunities within your contacts' industries, and make mental notes of items to research and explore after the event. This could lead to your next job.

9. Don't ask about job openings.

Instead of asking people about job openings at their company, pose questions to gain information about the person you're talking with, trying to learn more about their company, interests, and passions.

10. Don't hover around the buffet.

Networking events are about the people—not the food. Do not spend (too much) time with the hors d'oeuvres, no matter how fabulous they may be. You're there to expand your network and increase your opportunities—focus on people!

11. Focus on the person you're speaking with.

Don't let your eyes wander. Give 100 percent of your attention to the person with whom you're speaking. People can sense if you're looking for someone more interesting to talk to—so even if that's happening to you, you must be polite to your immediate audience. Excuse yourself gracefully, if need be. Always treat everyone with respect and attention.

12. Follow up after the event.

If you enjoyed meeting someone, email them saying so. Call them asking to meet for coffee over the next few weeks. This is how relationships start.

13. Don't stress yourself out.

Keep your purpose for these events in perspective. You're there to meet people and make connections. You won't find a job at the event, so relax. You wouldn't ask someone to marry you on the first date nor would you want to be asked. Well, networking opportunities are not even the first date! So set realistic, attainable goals in performing networking activities and you'll feel less pressure throughout the season.

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