



The Fringe Guide to Networking



Hate networking? You're not alone. Almost everyone finds networking the most difficult part of their job and believes they are terrible at it. It doesn't need to be that way, networking can be an enjoyable and fruitful part of working in the arts. The first step is to try and change the way you perceive networking by thinking of it as a way of balancing your job with pleasant conversation.

What is networking?

Networking means to build a network of contacts; i.e. people relevant to your industry that can help you achieve your goals or develop your career. Your network is built upon the direct or indirect relationships you have with real people, therefore you need to manage your network properly, nurture it and keep it strong in order for it to benefit you.

Know what you want

What are your goals? In order to network successfully you need to know what it is you are trying to achieve. You will then be able to identify the right sort of people to engage with.

- Do you need assistance with marketing?
- Do you need advice on fundraising?
- Are you looking for a new creative collaborator?

Fully understanding your goals prevents you from being vague, from chasing empty possibilities and you can talk to others about your needs in a concise and attractive way.

Nurturing your network

There are certain things you should do to prevent your network from collapsing. Be courteous in the same way you would with any other relationship and treat your contacts with care and attention. When you are developing networking behaviours bear in mind the following:

Be open-minded and always say thank you.

Treat others in the same way that you would like to be treated.

Remember that relationships work both ways and require as much care from you as the other person is prepared to offer.

Deliver on any promises you make.

Don't be afraid to introduce yourself.

Stay in touch with your new contacts; email them with relevant news or points of interest, keep them at the top of your mailing list.

Recognise problems and deal with them directly.

Learn to remember people's names at least 30 minutes after you meet them – when they offer their name repeat it back to them, say it out loud and you are more likely to remember it.

Giveaway products and services from time to time to your key contacts; tickets, promotional material, merchandise, sponsor product. Whatever you have available and can spare.

Don't be afraid to ask for what you want, if you never ask you might not ever receive.

If one of your contacts is holding an event or invites you to something then make an effort to attend if you can, you'll be surprised at how valuable this is.

Build a long lasting relationship with all your contacts. Think of this person as someone in the industry that you will know for the rest of your life and not just a day.

Meeting new people is a part of everyday life

Some of these acquaintances will come and go, while others will stay prominent for longer periods. You might meet someone today who in five years will be one of the most influential people in your field. The people we remember best are those that we have a connection with. It's difficult to do business with someone you don't like, so take your time and have decent conversations, this will lead to a genuinely valuable connection.

A networking relationship needs to be mutually beneficial

Both parties need to get something out of the connection otherwise the network is not sustainable. Going to a networking party or randomly handing out business cards will not get you anywhere unless you give back to those who help you.

Create opportunities by surrounding yourself with good people

Go where the people you need to meet are going to be. This includes conferences, functions, and events, among many others. The list changes with each field, making it impossible to cover them all here. To network effectively you need to be in the right place at the right time. There have been thousands of business deals done in bars and clubs, but this should not be your primary focus unless that is compatible with your specific market.

Be prepared for networking

Always come prepared to network with your business card so that you don't miss that vital chance of passing along your details when a potential contact is in front of you.

There is a high probability that the person you are trying to network with will want to network with you, especially if you provide an added benefit. Therefore, take a leap of faith – introduce yourself, or get someone that knows both of you to make an introduction.

Introductions are one of the most important aspects of business because they give you instant credibility and allow you to start building a relationship immediately. Remember, if you want someone to make an introduction, you have to be willing to return the favour.



Have a system for maintaining contact information

Don't keep track of your contacts on loose pieces of paper. Tools like Microsoft Outlook and other address book programs are more reliable systems to organise contacts and make them available to you quickly and easily. You never know when you might need someone's services, so keep yourself at the forefront of the person's memory by following up with them.

Don't panic if networking doesn't come naturally to you

This doesn't mean that you will never be able to make connections. There are many ways of building and nurturing networks and not all require you to be the extrovert in the room. If you are uncomfortable in a roomful of people you don't know then you might want to think about what you can offer others that doesn't demand a high level of social interaction.

It's more important to have one, really good conversation with one person than fly around the room handing out business cards without making any real connection. Take your time, chat to people and listen to what they have to say and you won't need to be embarrassed.

Think about how you can help

- A good networker is always thinking about how they can help people out.
- This might be an introduction to another contact, a recommendation of something relevant or useful or feedback on a piece of work.
- This will help people remember you and has the added advantage of making you feel good.

Don't be afraid to ask for help

- Most people feel flattered when they're asked for help, and are pleased to be able to offer it.
- Don't worry about imposing – if they don't have the time or the energy to give you what you've asked for then it's up to them to say no.

Be yourself

- Networking is about building authentic connections with people so there's no point in pretending you're interested, if what they are talking to you about will be of no benefit to you.

Find new opportunities to network

- Go to events you'd enjoy, but be mindful of your purpose for being there.
- Find a networking group especially for creative types, go on a course, or attend a local art opening.
- Sometimes you might need to visit an event regularly before you build up relationships.

Network with people you want to keep in touch with

- If you like and respect someone enough to keep in touch with them then that should be ample reason for maintaining a connection.
- You may be useful to each other's careers at some point and you may not.
- Enjoy building your network and marvellous things will begin to happen.



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