A new grad's guide to networking

Networking is an invaluable tool when you're in the market for a new job – particularly for graduates who may not have professional contacts. If you're not sure how to network, never fear. With a few easy steps, you can build a great network of useful connections.

Step 1: Be prepared

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Step 2: Get out there

Next, you'll need somewhere to network. Some networking events are open to all, some are by invitation, and some will require you signing up to a networking group in your area. Meetup is a great place to start if you're looking for local events with likeminded people.

Step 3: Clever ways to say hello

Striking up a conversation with a complete stranger can be intimidating, but everyone is there for the same reason - so don't worry, you're not intruding by saying hello. If you get stuck, there are three clever ways to introduce yourself at networking events:

1. Make a beeline for someone who is standing on their own and introduce yourself. In all likelihood, they're just as nervous as you are and will be grateful

you've included them.

2. Casual conversation while you're standing in line can be a Godsend. The wait also presents a great small talk opportunity. A simple "wow, it looks like it's going to be a big crowd tonight" or "the food looks amazing" are great openers (but don't ask if the event is open bar…).

3. Offer someone a genuine compliment. Telling someone you love their dress is a great way to break the ice and will instantly put them in a positive frame of mind about you.

Step 4: You've talked about the weather, what now?

Once you've broken the ice, create a meaningful conversation by asking your new contact about themselves. When they ask you about yourself, give them your elevator pitch and answer their questions, but always lead the conversation back to them. This will show that you're interested in them.

Keep your conversation business and event focused where possible, and never allow yourself to become intoxicated, even if the drinks are free. You never know when you could be meeting your future employer, so drink lightly!

Step 5: This isn't speed dating, but…

It's important for you ask for a business card so you can follow up with your new contact, but you don't want to ask for one too early and appear pushy. If they have not offered one by the time the conversation is winding down, you could say, "I'd love to stay in touch and follow up with you about XYZ – what's the best way to get into contact?"

Even if you meet the most interesting person at the beginning of the event, don't be tempted to talk to them all night. Know when it's time to shake their hand and move on. You might say something like, "It was really nice to meet you, but I'll let you carry on," or "I've just seen someone I need to say hello to".

After the event, be sure to follow up with every contact for whom you received a business card. This small professional courtesy can go a long way, so thank them for their time and add a personalised note to prompt their memory of you.