

Networking tips... for the Introvert and inexperienced networker.

It is often said that networking is an important skill. “It’s not what you know it’s who you know!” seems to describe the frustration felt by workers looking for ways to support young people find work.

YouthNow is a not for profit organisation that has been developing strong relationships with business and organisations to support career development in Melbourne’s West for over 10 years. We provide quality work experience opportunities for VET and VCAL students, Learn Local career pathways programs, mentoring and counselling services. 2015 marks the next phase of our services – establishing a career excellence centre for the South West Region of Victoria.

Every so often there are opportunities for our trainees to join a community event – as supporting team members to help make things run smoothly – or as attendees. Either way it is a chance **to meet new people and form a connection** to someone who may be able to help you.

Such an event can offer opportunities to meet a range of people from a range of jobs and to learn about what they do. Often a shared interest or experience can develop into an exciting opportunity. However, for introverts or inexperienced young people this can be a demanding experience – fraught with indecision, fear and exhaustion.

The following words of wisdom come from two web-based articles.

Appreciate your Introversion – work to your strengths.

Introversion is not a malady that you have to get over. Introversion is a preference for the inner world of ideas because this is where (your) energy comes from. By understanding and accepting this preference, introverts can optimise time spent with their ideas to refine them and recharge. This allows them to be (highly prepared), powerful and persuasive when networking occurs because they have done their homework. *(Lisa Petrilli)*

Research who is going – look on the event page on Facebook and make a list of who you would like to visit. Prepare some questions beforehand. Aim to make just one contact. If possible you may be able to introduce yourself via social media first. *(Lisa Petrilli & Jennifer Kahnweiler)*

Prepare your business cards – Create business cards that contain your key contact information. Email is the most important detail as Introverts prefer to communicate via the written word and build their networks in this way. Pack a pen so you can write reminders about the person on the back on the business cards you collect. *(Sophia Dembling)*

Avoid group discussions – seek out one on one conversations. Breathe; introduce yourself with a smile and handshake. Your Filter out the noise and distractions around you and focus on the person you are talking to. Network with a buddy until you gain your confidence. *(Sophia Dembling & Beth Buelow)*

Don't pre-judge small talk. It's the seed from which a connection can build into an in depth conversation. Start with: what you know of the guest speaker, the venue, where you work, weather, drive to the venue, weather. If it doesn't work, move on. No harm No Foul. (*Sophie Dembling*)

Remind yourself that you don't have to stay forever. Leave when you can or stay quiet once your energy levels drop. Give yourself half an hour to re-charge before going back to work. Follow up on any contacts via email as soon as possible or go onto LinkedIn and connect further. (*Lisa Petrilli*)

Treat the process as you would anything new you wanted to become adept (good) at. Watch others you admire. Find a mentor or networking partner. Accept that you'll feel lots of discomfort alongside moments of ease. And practice, practice, practice. (*Beth Buelow*)

Further Reading:

Beth Buelow:

www.theintrovertentrepreneur.com

Sophia Dembling:

<http://www.success.com/article/the-introverts-guide-to-networking#sthash.HfLjj7EP.dpuf>

Lisa Petrilli, The introverts guide to networking. (2012) Harvard Business Review

<https://hbr.org/2012/01/the-introverts-guide-to-networ>

Sophia Dembling, (2013) The Introverts Way: Living a Quiet Life in a Noisy World.

Jennifer Kahnweiler, PhD. (2013) The Introverts Guide to Making a Difference.