

# *U.S. 1*

## **NETWORKING ETIQUETTE FROM A PRO**

by Mary Harris

**March 30, 2016**

Of all of the topics that I weave into my etiquette presentations, business networking is one that I always make sure to spend a few minutes on no matter what the overall theme of the training is. Avoiding potentially embarrassing slip-ups early in a professional relationship will help leave a favorable first impression.

Navigating the waters of networking events can be challenging. A sea of people lie in front of you, so having a plan for what you want to accomplish before you arrive is important. Your goal may be to quickly meet as many people as possible, or you may only want to meet the keynote speaker. Either way, it's good to know that in advance so you can stay focused.

When first greeting someone, be sure to give a firm but not crushing handshake. Make eye contact, smile, and state your name slowly. If you have found that people often have trouble recalling your name or you just want to be more memorable, you can give a small piece of information about yourself or provide another easy way to remember you. I just met a woman who introduced herself as Reagan (like Ronald) Haines.

She gave me a quick and easy way to remember her. The next time we meet there is a better chance I'll recall her name. If you meet someone with a name that is difficult for you to understand it is OK to ask them to repeat their name or to ask them to speak slowly. But do not dismiss them by saying that their name is too difficult to understand or that you'll never remember it.

I began my career in the hospitality industry and we were trained to remember and use someone's name in conversation often, which builds trust and also helps you to remember their name in the long run.

When moving from group to group in a networking situation, be careful to keep things light and professional. Stay to conversation topics that are suitable for all, like general questions about what business someone is in or who else they might know in attendance. In an election year it's hard to do, but don't discuss politics. It's difficult to determine what someone's political views are, and your joke could be deeply offensive to someone else.

After attending several events it may be tempting to ask more personal questions, but remember not to get too personal too quickly. You may frequently bump into to some of the same people in your professional circles, but keep in mind that it's still business, and over-sharing can be uncomfortable for someone that you really don't know outside of two or three events a year.

After your initial introduction, remember to continue making eye contact during conversation and to really listen to the other person. Don't monopolize the conversation, interrupt, or talk all about yourself. We get very focused on what we want to say and often miss the opportunity to actively listen to the person speaking right in front of us.

You have the opportunity to make a real connection when you take the time to get to know three people at a networking event rather than hand out business cards to 50 people without even a hello. When you hand out your business card to peers first ask if you may give your card. It's polite to also ask for their business card in return. When meeting someone very senior to you, it is best to wait for that person to ask you for your business card before presenting it yourself. Your card should be on good quality cardstock and be in an easy-to-read font briefly explaining your title and what you do. When going to a networking event be sure to have enough cards and have them accessible so you don't have to scramble every time when you're asked for one. They should be clean, crisp, and wrinkle and smudge-free. When you receive a card be sure to take a second to look it over as a sign of respect before putting it away.

Depending on the level of the connection made during networking be sure to follow up within two days via E-mail, phone, or LinkedIn and make good on any promises you made. If you said that you would connect someone then you should connect them, if you said that you would follow up then you should follow up in a timely manner. Whatever you discussed, even if it's over a glass of wine, should be treated like any other 9-5 business conversation. Meeting new people is the beginning of building trust so showing early on that you are reliable is key.

Whether you are just starting out in your career or you are a seasoned professional your relationships will be valuable assets that you carry with you for years to come.

*Harris is an event planner and trainer in Princeton. [www.maryharrisevents.com](http://www.maryharrisevents.com), @MaryHarrisNJ, or 609-947-3169.*

<http://princetoninfo.com/files/library/pdfs/395.pdf>