

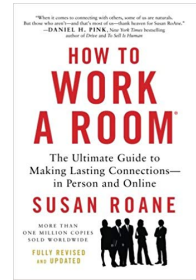
# How to Work a Room

Susan Roane (1988)

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*Notes by Bob Evely  
Wilmore, Kentucky; 2009.*

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Leaders and successful people have learned to overcome their shyness. They don't wait; they reach out and extend themselves to people. In "The Magic of Thinking Big," David Schwartz says, "It's a mark of real leadership to take the lead in getting to know people ... it's always a big person who walks up to you and offers his/her hand and says hello."

If you don't take the risk and reach out to people, you never make new friends or contacts. We risk our lives all the time on the freeway.

## **Use positive self-talk**

We're all busy, but everyone enjoys connecting with other people. "I'm a valuable, likeable person. Extending myself is a gift that others appreciate."

## **Common interests**

When you attend a health club, church or organization you have a common interest with those people. Look for what you have in common – children, hobbies, jobs. These interests can be the basis for conversation.

## **Prepare a short self-introduction**

Make it short and appropriate for the type of gathering.

## **Move from "guest" behavior to "host" behavior**

Most people in a social or networking situation tend to behave as guest or hosts. Hosts exhibit gracious manners – meeting people, starting conversations, introducing others and making sure their needs are met. The bottom line is that hosts have something to do and guests do not.

## **Volunteer to be on the greeting committee**

It's your job to meet people and make them feel comfortable. You have something specific to do. You have an excuse to be as outgoing as you want to be.

## **If by chance someone is rude ...**

Simply walk away. Don't try to out-rude them.

## **Identify what you hope to accomplish before the event**

The most common professional goals:

- To be perceived as powerful and in control
- To establish communication, connections, rapport
- To increase resource base; potential clients
- To gain insight; learn new information
- To increase business and income
- To enhance career opportunities
- To have fun

Personal benefits can be at least as important as the professional. Even if you never discuss business, the people you meet while working a room can become lasting friends.

### **Building a rolodex**

One benefit to working a room is extraordinary and unique ... you can build an enormous rolodex. In a study of 2,000 millionaires, Georgia State Professor Thomas Stanley found that they had one important trait in common ... a huge rolodex. They also have an ability to distinguish quality contacts – those who are able and willing to help them.

### **Develop charm**

Charm is the art of conveying interest, concern and caring for another person. It has been said of Queen Elizabeth II's mother, "She had the gift of making you feel she's been waiting all week to meet you."

### **Be sincere**

1. As you're talking, don't move your eyes around the room to see who else is there. Listen when people talk.
2. Don't monopolize the conversation or talk about yourself.
3. Don't just try to make your "contact quota."
4. Don't use questionable humor.
5. Don't overdrink.
6. Dress appropriately.
7. Don't smoke.
8. Don't overeat.
9. Don't "size-up" people by their nametag.
10. Don't be loud.
11. Don't be a "hard-sell."
12. Always follow thru on offers or promises.
13. Don't complain about the food, room or other attendees.

### **Prepare**

Barbara Walters never relies on her Research Department; she does her own to supplement. She always prepares more questions than she will have time for.

1. Adopt a positive attitude. We straighten our ties before going out – a positive attitude is even more important and deserves at least as much attention. A little enthusiasm and a smile go a long way.
2. Focus on the benefits of the event ... what is your purpose in attending.
3. Plan your self-introduction. Speak clearly and look people in the eye.
4. Check your supply of business cards.
5. Prepare your small talk – it gets you thru the challenge of "What shall I say next?" While monopolizing conversation is bad manners, so is not talking enough. Michael Korda says, "A bore is someone who has no small talk ... Silence is not golden, it is the kiss of death ... Small talk should intrigue, delight, amuse, fill up time pleasantly ... The aim of small talk is to make people feel comfortable ... It's a game, like tennis, in which the object is to keep the ball in the air for as long as possible.
6. Remember eye contact and a smile.
7. Practice your handshake.

### **Business Cards**

1. When receiving someone's card, write a note on it *asap* to help you remember who they are.
2. Never leave home without them.
3. If you want to give your card to someone but they have not asked for it, ask for theirs first.
4. Pass out your cards discriminately. Not everyone should have your card.
5. The exchange of cards should follow a conversation in which rapport has been established.

### **The Entrance**

Never be late; it is never fashionable. When you arrive, take a deep breath, stand tall and walk into the room. Give the room a once over. See where people are congregating and where you can position yourself to meet the most people. Look for people you know, or those that look familiar. Go up and introduce yourself.

### **The Buddy System**

You may know people your buddy doesn't know, and vice-versa. Even if neither of you knows anyone, you'll both meet people and can then introduce each other to your new friends. Make sure you split up as soon as possible so you don't appear to be Siamese twins and so you can meet more people.

### **Accessible People**

Look for those standing alone who are so scared that they have white knuckles from clutching their drink. They usually welcome your conversation. Make eye contact, smile and say hello. Don't treat people as losers ... maybe they're just shy or anxious.

### **Nametags**

When filling out your own nametag, identify yourself in an interesting way. When one individual labeled himself "Financial Planner" no one looked twice. When he simply wrote "Money" beneath his name he was approached by many interested people waiting to know what he did. Nametags should be worn on your right hand side so as to be easily read when shaking hands.

### **State your name**

Don't make people struggle trying to remember your name. Relieve the other person and you will be remembered kindly.

### **Great opening lines**

Look to the magical three:

1. A statement: Look around and observe the situation. What do you see? Observations make good conversation starters. Avoid negative comments; keep it upbeat.
2. A question: Make it relevant. "Are you a member of this group?"
3. A pleasant self-revelation: Establish your vulnerability and approachability. "It never fails. I always get mustard on my tie."

### **Moving in**

Recognize the difference between "including" yourself in other people's conversations, and "intruding" in them.

1. Avoid approaching two people having an intense conversation.

2. Approach groups of three or more. Position yourself close to the group. Give only facial feedback to the conversation. When you feel included, either verbally or by eye contact, join in the conversation.
3. Be open to others who “want in.”

### **Extricating yourself**

After you have just finished a comment, smile and say, “Excuse me, it was nice meeting you.” Then visibly move to another part of the room.

### **Making conversation**

Initial impressions are based on our ability to communicate and converse. The trick is to do it with ease, interest and energy. “Nothing is so contagious as enthusiasm; it moves stones, it charms brutes.” (Edward Bulwer-Lytton)

Be in the moment. Make those two minutes with each person memorable by giving your undivided attention.

1. Read one newspaper each day. This is the best knowledge bank from which to draw conversation. Information is power. We don’t need to be an expert on everything, but we should be well-read enough to initiate or contribute to conversation.
2. Clip and collect. Send copies of articles that relate to a conversation. It’s a way of being remembered.
3. Read newsletters, professional journals and minutes.
4. Take notes ... comments and situations you hear that can be good conversation starters.
5. Use humor. The right sentence or phrase at the right moment can save a negotiation or a board meeting.

### **Listen actively; not passively**

Active listening means “hearing” what people say, concentrating on them and their words, and then responding.

### **Manners**

People with manners are those who treat others in such a way that everyone is comfortable with them. Letita Baldrige claims that manners are 99% common sense and 1% kindness.

### **Introductions**

If you forget a name, tell the truth, preferably with humor.

- Forgive me. Since I’ve turned 40 I barely remember my own name.
- Please help me out. I’ve just gone blank. It’s genetic.
- It’s been a hectic day.

Proper etiquette in introduction is important, but we shouldn’t worry so much about it that we lose our warmth or humor. The most important thing is that people know you want them to meet one another.

### **Thank you notes**

Thank you’s are an extremely gracious gesture appreciated by every host. Most agree that handwritten notes are more valued. They reflect personal care, thought and time expended. When everyone is being computer efficient, why not take the time to distinguish ourselves. Tom Peters always responds to his mail with brief handwritten notes.

### **Cocktail parties**

1. First stop should be the hosts. It is their job to meet, greet and introduce you to others.
2. Mingle and circulate. It's rude to latch onto one person for the evening.
3. Fall back on, "How do you know Bob (the host)?" for a conversation starter.
4. Always carry your business cards.
5. Remember to thank the hosts before you leave.
6. If there is no official host (i.e. Chamber of Commerce) there is usually a greeting committee. Start by introducing yourself to a member of the committee.
7. If a dinner follows, don't sit with people you know. This is a chance to meet 7-9 new people, all of whom have something in common with you.
8. Introduce yourself to the group at the table and ask others to do the same.

### **Office parties**

If clients are in attendance, you are also a host.

### **Business socials**

This is one of the best forms of free advertising available. It is easier to remember a person's profession than their name.

Business socials are not usually a place to finalize deals or sign contracts. It is a place to meet people, get to know them better and discover **what you have in common**. It's a chance to establish rapport.

People that get the most out of business events have three traits in common.

1. They **want** to be there.
2. They are prepared; with cards.
3. They have a clear idea of who they want to meet. But be gracious; treat **everyone** with importance.

Carl LaMell, Executive Director of the Victor Neumann Association, must attend many events. He says, "After working a full day, I rarely want to go to a cocktail party or reception. But once I am there, I am ready to do my job and have a good time."

### **Enthusiasm**

When we are having a good time, our enthusiasm generates enthusiasm in others. They want to be around us and to do business with us.

### **LaMell's advice for working fundraisers (or other events)**

1. Know who you have to see.
2. Make sure they don't know it's your goal to see them.
3. Don't talk business. Make the connection, set rapport and be sure they know who you are.
4. Don't over-stay your welcome. Don't monopolize any one person.
5. Depending on the response to you, get the business card.
6. Follow-up.

### Congressman Joseph Kennedy

The way Kennedy works a room is a lesson to all of us. Before his speech, he went around to each table and spoke to every single person there – connecting with each person. He smiled, looked into their eyes, exuded warmth and touched people. He was funny, had something to say to everyone, listened when they talked, and responded. The interest, warmth, sparkle and humor were real, and everyone knew it.

Kennedy has an ability to convey genuine pleasure in meeting and talking with people. There is a special warmth and sense of caring about Joe Kennedy because he looked like he was having a fantastic time himself. Meeting people didn't seem to be a chore, but a joy.

### Class reunions

Business opportunities aren't limited to your former classmates. If you're travelling to your hometown, give some thought to other potential contacts there.

Talk to everyone. You never know what treasure you'll find. Build your "millionaire's rolodex."

### Trade Shows

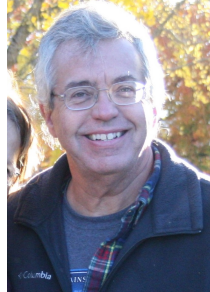
1. When preparing, write down a list of questions those attending might have about your business. Put yourself in their shoes.
2. Follow up after the event is critical. One individual who spoke with 15 different companies at a trade show only received 3 follow-ups that were promised.
3. Pre-planning is essential. Primary and secondary targets should be established. Take the time to learn about the association so that conversation flows more readily. A good goal is to establish new relationships.
4. A recent study showed that 57% of all trade show attendees plan to buy one or more of the exhibited products or services within the year.
5. The American Society of Association Executives "Marketing Newsletter" reports that it takes only one follow-up call to close a sale from a trade show contact, as compared with five calls for the average industrial sale.
6. Display the 3 E's ... effort, energy and enthusiasm.
7. Prepare interesting tidbits as conversation starters. "May I help you" is not a good one.
8. Interesting booth design is important. One company had a shoe shine booth, and as sales managers shined shoes they had 2-3 minutes to speak with potential clients. The unusual and original always make a booth more interesting.
9. The Wonder Company, planners of special events, conventions and corporate meetings, say that trade show meetings are "theatre" for which you need **Script** (the body of information you give and receive), **Schedule** (the timetable and appointments set prior to the event) and **Staging** (when and where to move).
10. When walking the floor to see other exhibits, carry a small notebook to record information and ideas. List the people you want to see.

### Working the world

Every situation you encounter is "a room." The airplane, golf course, pool, supermarket ... all offer opportunities.

Seize the moment, wherever you are. In a sense, “working the world” is just another way of “living life to the fullest.” The rewards go to the risk-takers ... those willing to put their egos on the line and reach out.

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