

How NOT to Fail at Networking



By [Joelle K. Jay@JoelleKJay](mailto:Joelle.K.Jay@JoelleKJay)



At an event recently, a businessman walked up to me with his business card in hand. He smiled and winked, handed me his card, and delivered his slick elevator pitch in one clearly practiced motion. I thought, “*Ick.*”

My next thought was, “Yikes – I hope when I introduce myself at a networking event, people don’t think, “*Ick!*”

The Ick Factor in networking is directly related to one avoidable thing: insincerity. To the businessman winking his way over to me, I seemed like a “prospect.” Certainly his approach made me

feel like one. I was a target, and getting me to take some kind of action to his benefit was seemingly the goal.

You can avoid the Ick Factor and make sure people respond well to your outreach by dropping the façade and bringing something far more meaningful to the conversation: *you*.

I believe that businessmen and businesswomen are most successful in their networking when they're truly genuine, and when they think of networking as building strong relationships with people they care about over the things they value.

Otherwise networking is too transactional. People fail at networking when they start with the task of achieving something – “I need to get a job,” “I need to make this ask of somebody,” “I need to get a client.” They succeed when they seek to build deep relationships with people they really genuinely care about.

Researchers have observed that men and women tend to network differently – another element of networking you can use to refine your approach and genuinely connect with others. They note that women tend to lead their networking with a focus on *relationships*. They will talk to people in a way that's about getting to know them, and ask questions like what brought them to the event. Women will use that as a foundation for eventually transitioning into a business conversation.

In those same studies, men are shown to lead with *business*. They are more likely to start by asking someone about their profession, and what they're hoping to accomplish at the event. And then, if they identify common interests they will evaluate the relationship as one to move forward with at that point.

With that in mind, whether you're networking with a man or woman, one way that you can master networking very quickly is to let other people lead the conversation just long enough to understand which angle they're coming from. If the person in front of you opens with a relationship-forming question (“Have you been involved with this organization long?” “Are you front this area?” “What does your lapel pin mean?”), ask a relationship-forming question back. If the person opens with a business-type question (“So, what do you do?” “What brings you to this conference?” “How do you define success?”), ask a business-oriented question back. You will be starting the conversation with the focus where it should be: on the person with whom you're starting to connect.

Essentially, by deciding which of the two approaches a new acquaintance takes, you can actually control the conversational outcomes much better, and ultimately, make stronger connections that make networking more worthwhile.

Read more about Joelle's views on networking in [Oprah Magazine](#). For more resources on effective networking and other leadership coaching materials, see Joelle's [recent books and articles](#).

PUBLISHED ON: MAY 2, 2019

Dr. Joelle Jay is a Director with the Leadership Research Institute, as well as an executive coach, keynote speaker, and the author of *The Inner Edge: The Ten Practices of Personal Leadership*. Joelle specializes in

the advancement of executive women, and she is proud to have supported the development of top talent into positions of leadership for many successful companies, including MetLife, Adobe, and Microsoft.