I've had several conversations recently with my clients and other lawyers focused on event networking challenges. That was a cue to post again about tips to improve your skills and comfort level with networking at events. If you go with a purpose and a plan, you'll make the most of your next event, including enjoying it.

**Before you go:**

1. Identify the returns before you go. Knowing what you want and why you are there will motivate you to make the most of the event. Are you looking for advice? Do you want to meet new people? Maybe you just want to have fun. That is okay, too.
2. Practice your self-introduction. Incorporate energy, enthusiasm, examples.
3. Read up on the day's news. Starting a conversation can be as easy as saying something about the event or the facility or asking what drew the other person to the event.
4. Put your business cards in your suit pocket or outer pocket of your purse. Keep cards in your car in case you forget to put them in your suit or purse, or in case you attend an event on the spur of the moment.

**Arrive Early:**

1. Scan the nametags on the registration table. Look for names of people or companies you would like to meet or might help.
2. Meet the organizers and hosts, including the people behind the registration table. Ask and listen to what they want to accomplish with the event. Consider how you can help it be a success.
3. Put your name tag on your right lapel or where that lapel would be. This makes it easier for people to read as they extend their hand.
4. Meet other people as they arrive, before they start breaking into groups. This tactic helps you avoid being in a room where everyone is already talking to someone else.

**During the Event:**

1. Focus on others instead of on yourself. Try one of the following.
   - Be gracious and act like you are a host. Approach those standing alone. Rescue them and they will be grateful.
   - Connect people with others in the room.
   - Have energetic conversations. Ask questions to engage people in something that interests them. “How did you get started in your business? How would I know if I am speaking to a potential client of yours? What is your biggest challenge?”
   - Listen well. Two ears, one mouth—listen twice as much as you speak.
   - Smile and say hello to people, even in passing, while acting as confidently as you can as if you know them. (Haven’t you ever walked down the street or into a
restaurant with someone who enjoys smiling and greeting people they see? They are so often greeted the same way in return, their positive attitude is a pleasure to be around, and pretty soon they do know a lot more people....

2. If no one is standing alone, look for groups of 3 or more.

- People tend to pair up. A group with an odd number can be easier to join.

- Look for a group where people are laughing. Join after the laughter or during a break in the conversation. “This looks like a fun group, do you mind if I join you?”

- Does someone appear unengaged in the conversation? Introduce yourself to that person.

- If you feel uncomfortable, move on and find ways to help other people.

3. Start conversations with people while in line for the bar or food.

4. Spend time getting to know new people. You can talk with your friends and colleagues another time. Keep in mind your purposes for attending the event.

5. Get the business cards of the people with whom you feel a strong connection. Again, keep in mind your purposes for attending. You do not have to get cards from everyone.

6. To end a conversation and move on, say something like “Thank you, I’ve enjoyed talking with you. I hope you enjoy the rest of the evening.” Then move purposefully away. (Yes, this is hard and it takes practice! Watch how others do it and notice what you think works well.)

After the Event

1. Congratulate yourself for going, for arriving early and for whatever else you did well.

2. Consider what you can do differently next time.

3. Record notes and contact information for those people with whom you felt a connection. Follow up with them in timely, appropriate ways. Sending a LinkedIn request a day or two later, with a personal note, might be a very easy way to establish a connection and path for following up in the near future.

Walking into a room full of strangers, most of whom are already talking to someone else is hard. I know, I’ve been there. Ending a conversation and moving on is hard as well, sometimes very hard. Practice, practice, practice. Aim for progress, not perfection.

I’m off to a lawyer event tonight. Fortunately I’ll know most of the people there but I still have to aim for progress.

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