

# Conference tip: Be nice to the name badge girl

BY DIANE DARLING

Every conference brochure markets networking as one of the key reasons to attend. Such events have multiple constituencies each with their own unique networking goals.

Let's review each group and identify why each would want to participate.

## Convention constituents

- **Sponsors.** They want to network with prospects, reinforce their value to clients, rub elbows with VIPs and speakers, and position themselves as a leader. Low-key recruiting also takes place.

- **Exhibitors.** They want to meet with prospects as well as clients. They want to meet decision makers (or influencers) which is how they evaluate the ROI for the booth costs. They are also watching networking to see if future sponsorship would be a worthwhile investment.

- **Speakers.** Networking with other speakers and sponsors is partially why speakers agree to attend (in addition to being paid). Everyone in the room knows who you are and what your company does. This makes networking much easier as others approach the speaker. In addition, speakers often have books or other products to sell.

- **Attendees.** This is the collection of everyone above as well as individuals who are simply interested in the topic and purchase a ticket. While not as easy to identify their specific goal for attending (competitive research, sourcing vendors, evaluating trends, hearing speakers), they want to feel welcomed by the other constituents.

- **Conference organizers.** They are similar to a parent hoping to please the entire family on a vacation (including the teenagers) — a daunting task. Their success is dependent on others reaching their goals so everyone returns. Each party must walk away happy and having felt their precious resources of time, money and energy — were well invested. Ulti-

mately financial success determines whether such an event will be repeated. Thus the organizers need to network with everyone so each group puts their money on the table for the next round.

## Tips for the convention

- Wear really comfortable shoes
- Be friendly to everyone. This is much easier if you actually do wear comfortable shoes. This doesn't mean you need to be a wild extrovert or the life of the party. Simply say hello to others. When you're approachable, you're more likely to get business.

- Worry less about identifying the "right" person to meet. Recently I helped with check-in at a conference. I was startled by people who treated me as a complete nobody vs. others who were gracious even though I was only the name badge girl. Be nice to everyone ... you never know!

- Ask the concierge to book a table for 12 at a nearby affordable restaurant. During the first day of the convention, invite people to join you. Mention the entrée price is \$XX so it's clear they are paying for their own meal.

- Confidential conversations should take place in private settings — that excludes elevators and especially bars. You don't want to be the one who gives away a competitive secret overheard by a reporter.

- Say hello to press and speakers. Many people with a public persona are actually quite shy. This can also be true for press and speakers. Ask them a question about the story they're covering or a comment they made in their presentation.

- Respect people during off hours. A

story was shared about someone who was swimming laps at the conference hotel. The salesperson went to the pool, stopped them as they were between laps and asked them to come by their booth to see their new product. This is invasive, disrespectful and downright frightening.

## And after the convention

- Follow up, follow up, follow up.

- **Organize** received business cards in three categories: A, B, C. "A" people hear from you within 24 to 48 hours. You owe them information, an introduction, a proposal, etc. "B" people should hear from you within 30 days. "C" people go on your mailing list.

- Follow up three times and then give it a break. You don't want to be viewed as a stalker. I'll revisit the person after 90 days

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to try again.

- In some cases identify someone else in the firm who is a better person to do the follow up. Make the introduction using an e-intro.

Whether you were there as a host or attendee, networking is your key to maximizing the value of a conference. With some preparation and practice, you'll get your time and money investment back over and over again.

*Diane Darling is the author of "The Networking Survival Guide." She is the founder and CEO of Effective Networking Inc., a Boston-based firm that teaches networking skills through interactive workshops. She can be reached at 617-305-2121.*