

Face-to-Face Business Networking Techniques:

The Six Keys to Networking at Real Estate Conferences



**Contributed by Chair of ARES JOB Placement Committee,
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The real estate industry is a relationship business. Consequently, networking will continue to play a big part in your success in the industry. And, regardless of the real estate market or new technologies, face-to-face meetings at conferences will forever provide you with opportunities to make valuable connections in the field. Additionally, statistics report that over 60% of job seekers find a job via their networks. Since face-to-face networking is not always easy, even for the seasoned professional, this article presents some simple techniques that you can use to improve your results at a business conference.

Lesson 1: Set Your Goal/goals

Before the event, you should first decide what your main objectives or professional goals are for attending the conference. Even if your main purpose is to find a job, you need to also pursue other professional goals as well, because not everyone at the conference can or wants to help others find a job---especially in a tough job market. Below are a few professional development activities you may want to pursue:

- Find a new job or career opportunity
- Learn from experts in your field
- Improve your communication skills
- Explore publishing opportunities
- Build relationships with colleagues
- Learn about education programs
- Other goals that are important to you (explain?)

Lesson 2: Review the Conference Program

Register as early as you can for the conference. By registering early, you may save money, ensure a spot at the conference hotel, and you will be to review the conference program so that you can identify networking opportunities. Most conference programs today are available at the organization's website. Once you have a copy of the conference program, you should try to spot the presenters, panelists, and meetings where you believe you will find your best opportunities to develop contacts or find a lead for a job. Some suggestions are:

- Leaders who may be able to offer you a career position
- Professionals who have a research area that interests you

- Journal editors and others who will advise you on how to publish your research
- Panels on topics which you can gain new knowledge in your business arena
- Committees where you may be able to serve
- Colleagues with whom you can collaborate

After you have identified some people, companies, or education programs, do your homework to find out more about them. A good place to start is at the organization's website. For example, The American Real Estate Society (ARES) is made of some of the top academic and business leaders from around the globe. And every year, ARES holds one main conference which draws hundreds of attendees. The conference program contains formal and informal opportunities to network. The ARES website contains information about the conference program, the organization, ARES membership, ARES leadership team, as well as a job section specifically designed to help provide job resources and positions available in both the industry and in academia at (<http://www.aresnet.org>). ARES membership information can also be viewed on: YouTube at (<http://www.YouTube.com/RealEstateSociety>, and on Facebook at <http://www.FaceBook.com>.

Lesson 3: Design Your Conference Schedule

After you have highlighted the program, write an informal schedule that contains the events you plan to attend.

- ***Establish priorities.*** Write a “to-do” list to place items in order of importance. Your list should contain all the events, meetings and paper sessions where you believe you can build valuable relationships and advance your professional knowledge.
- ***Be realistic.*** Understand how many hours you can devote to typical daily activities and plan your schedule accordingly
- ***Keep your schedule flexible.*** Adjust your schedule to meet your goals when new opportunities present themselves
- ***Reevaluate.*** Take a few minutes daily to review your schedule to make sure you are on the right tract to reach your business goals.

Lesson 4: Prepare Your Professional Materials

Before attending the conference, you should prepare your professional documents for the target audience. ARES website contains job information and resources to help you design your documents at www.aresnet.org. You should bring the following items:

- Prepare your curriculum vitae (CV) or resume and a general cover letter
- Bring several paper copies of your documents
- Store your files for easy access on your computer or on a flash drive
- Take many business cards
- Carry a pen and paper to jot down important information
- Bring appropriate attire. Your clothing should always look neat and be appropriate for the setting. If in doubt of what to wear, always wear a more formal business attire rather than casual clothing.

Lesson 5: Follow Networking Guidelines

At a business event, it is a good idea to follow a few basic guidelines when approaching others:

- **Prepare your introduction.** “Your elevator speech” is a 30 to 60 second introduction about you that includes your name and what you like to do professionally. You should have more than one introduction speech ready so that you can use the appropriate speech with participants; for example, you should only ask directly for a job from attendees who are clearly advertising that they have jobs available at their organization.
- **Arrive early.** Always arrive as early as you can to an event so you can meet as many attendees as possible and pick up handouts. Informal meetings are sometimes the most valuable. At the end of the session, introduce yourself to presenters and exhibitors.
- **Ask powerful questions.** Try to ask questions that show that you are interested in the person. You can ask them about their work, their research interests, and their purpose for attending the conference, etc.
- **Listen to others.** Don’t do all the talking. Like in a good tennis match, a good conversationalist spends a considerable amount of time listening as well as talking.
- **Provide business cards.** Make sure to take enough cards for the entire conference.
- **Get business cards from others.** Save the card in a file you can retrieve after the conference. Whether you do this in a Rolodex, in a notebook, or in a file on your computer, you need to keep your contacts' names, addresses, phone numbers, companies, job titles, along with a short note of how you met them, and subsequent conversations you've had with them.
- **Drop names when appropriate.** If you are interested in a particular company you have targeted at the conference, and several people are represented in a meeting, try to introduce yourself to people who can pave the way for you with the person in charge of hiring for the company.
- **Focus on partnerships.** Always meet others with a focus on building relationships with people who can and want to help you and you in turn, are committed to always looking for ways to help them. The Key is to build mutually beneficial relationships. For instance, if you are seeking a new position, you should be able to state why you can add value to the organization.
- **Treat everyone you meet with respect.** As in the saying, “what goes around comes around,” that is especially true in the business world. If you want respect, treat others with respect. If you want to be included in conversations at conferences, always try to include others. If you want your phone calls and emails returned, be sure to return the favor ---you get the idea.
- **Offer to join a committee.** One of the best ways to network is from the inside, so look for opportunities to join a committee in your area of interest.
- **Look for mentors.** A main goal of most professional associations is to provide education and professional development. So, you may find someone who will offer to help you develop your research agenda, or other career goals.
- **Plan an exit strategy.** In a large group setting, you should circulate. So before the event, create a sentence you can use to excuse yourself from a conversation so that you can mingle throughout the crowd.

- ***Remain energetic and upbeat.*** When offering to work with someone on a project or hiring someone for a job, a positive attitude goes a long way. So remember to smile and try to have fun.

Lesson 6: Follow-up

After the face-to-face meeting is over, it is very important to follow-up a valuable relationship with a short email within a few days.

- ***Subject heading of email.*** Place something in the subject heading of your email so the recipient recognizes it is from you. Then, start the email by referencing your previous conversation when you met. This is intended to jog the person's memory in case they don't remember the entire conversation with you.
- ***Always say thank you.*** Thank the person for sharing his/her valuable time and knowledge, and perhaps, offering you a future opportunity.
- ***Use appropriate business format.*** Emails have become business documents. Therefore, you should prepare your emails as if you are writing professional letters, and check for grammatical and spelling errors, especially if you are looking to advance your career.
- ***Arrange for future meetings.*** If you believe the connection will lead to a future opportunity, ask to set-up another meeting.

Whether your goal at a conference is to build new relationships or find a job, don't be discouraged if you don't have an instant result, because building relationships takes time. Sometimes a five minute conversation, can lead to a life-time relationship. So be patient and optimistic.

And most importantly, always offer to be a resource for others by asking yourself, "What is in it for them?" As in the words of **Dale Carnegie** who wrote one of the best books on networking ever written, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, "You can make more friends in two months by becoming more interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get people interested in you."

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