

Retro-Networking™

7 Retro-Networking™ Tips

By Vicky Oliver

Social networking is a great way to meet new colleagues, clients, and customers. But there's another way: retro-networking™. Retro-networking is all about finding new and interesting ways to forge professional connections with people face-to-face — people who can further your career or business. And because retro-networking doesn't get as much buzz as social networking does, it's actually surprisingly effective. Here are seven new ways to do it.

1. Gather moss. Use travel as a business networking opportunity. Sign up for an airline club membership and then strike up a conversation in the airport club lounge with someone who looks bored. In the hotel lounge, spot someone who's sitting alone and ask if you can join him or her. Before you leave home, consider booking a golf game at your destination with fellow business travelers using an online golf club. Be super-productive while waiting for your next flight by letting your social network colleagues know you'll be available for an in-person meeting in the airport lounge.

2. Connect with a “connector.” The next time you're at a party or other gathering, step back and locate the connector — the man or woman who seems super confident, is surrounded by people jostling for his or her attention, and seems to know them all by name. The connector is like a human phone book — he or she is usually a master at winning friends. Although connectors may seem unapproachable, they actually live for (and love) networking. Find a way to introduce yourself to the connector and you'll gain access to a whole new community. It's like establishing “instant roots” without having a family tree in place first — or even a membership at the club.

3. Do good. Some nonprofits attract movers and shakers in the business world — art and history museums, historical societies, and botanical gardens, to name a few. Become active on some of the core committees, such as fund-raising or the events-planning committee. Your good deeds will not go unnoticed, and could ultimately lead to new client and customer referrals. You'll also have a chance to polish new skills and probably get to some great parties. That's a win-win-win-win.

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- 4. Develop a retro hobby.** All work and no play makes Jill a dull girl, not to mention a boring conversationalist. So resolve to play more, knowing that some of the best opportunities to form professional relationships occur when you're not at the office. Find an activity that involves other people. Some examples are bridge, mahjong, chess, or even collecting. If there isn't a group in your community, you can start one by posting your interest on Craigslist. Meetup, Facebook, and LinkedIn all provide ways to start groups as well.
- 5. Don't eat alone at home.** Or for that matter, don't eat in bars or at hotdog stands either. Everybody has to eat. Why waste a great networking opportunity by noshing at home or alone? Invite colleagues to breakfast, lunch, and dinner. They will appreciate the one-on-one time and attention you're giving them, and they'll likely return the favor by inviting you the next time. Great things happen over food. Pass the ideas, please.
- 6. Be true to your schools.** It's smart to network with your fellow alumni. Contact your high school, college, or business school and sign up for the alumni newsletter. You'll learn about networking events in your area and in places where you might travel for business. Then get in touch. You won't be a stranger once you introduce yourself as a fellow alumna/us.
- 7. Be a people magnet cum laude.** The way you speak, dress, move, shake hands, and communicate says everything about who you are — in a matter of seconds. Be the type of person that draws others to you by drawing them out about themselves and their interests. As you become more comfortable with retro-networking, your circle of acquaintances will expand. And one day in the not too distant future, friends will look to you as a "connector." It may not be today. It may not be tomorrow. But if you stand up straight, act confident, and take a genuine interest in others, it will happen eventually.

Vicky Oliver is the author of five best-selling career development books: *301 Smart Answers To Tough Interview Questions*; *The Millionaire's Handbook*; *301 Smart Answers To Tough Business Etiquette Questions*; *Power Sales Words*; and *Bad Bosses, Crazy Coworkers & Other Office Idiots*.

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