

## 6 Secrets to Successful Schmoozing

by Larry Buhl, for Yahoo! HotJobs

You're probably familiar with the necessity of networking in advancing your career. But how well you network often depends on how well you schmooze.

Successful schmoozing isn't glad-handing or insincere sucking up -- although expressing sincere admiration can be an important schmooze tactic. Instead, it's the grease that starts the wheels of [networking](#), according to Susan RoAne, author of "How to Work a Room."

"Schmoozing is nothing more than making casual, easygoing conversation with strangers," RoAne tells Yahoo! HotJobs. "Networking is the art of the follow-up. When you have the schmoozing down, your networking can be effective."

But starting a casual conversation with a stranger -- especially when that stranger has the power to boost your career -- can be nerve-wracking for even the most outgoing people.

Experts have some recommendations for making business schmoozing natural, enjoyable, and effortless (or at least appear that way):

### 1. Investigate.

Find out who in your profession or related profession could be good to know, and learn more about them. A good start is to find out if they have an online presence, such as social and professional networking sites, according to Barbara Safani, career advisor and author of "Happy About My Resume."

"If you know they're going to be attending a professional event, find a way to attend. And if you learn that person shares an interest with you, say, a love of a sports team or hobby, that's great knowledge you can use to start a conversation."

### 2. Go beyond the usual suspects.

Plenty of professionals want to meet the CEO, CIO, or C-whomever-can-help. But often those people are deluged with requests, are harder to approach, and may be too high up to advance your career.

John O'Connor, president of Career Pro, Inc., recommends schmoozing administrative assistants. "They're the gatekeepers in most businesses and may have valuable information on the inner workings of the organization. But you always want to project professionalism and good etiquette when schmoozing administrative assistants."

### 3. Schmooze well before you need something.

If you want the other person to set you up with a job or a new business after a two-minute conversation, set your sights lower. "You don't want to look desperate," says Laura DeCarlo, career coach and author of "Job Search Bloopers."

"Schmoozing should be a warm-up, establishing contact and making the person feel comfortable with you long before you ask for something." DeCarlo adds that the time between initial schmooze and asking for what you really want could be up to six months.

#### **4. Prepare a short self-introduction.**

Forget the 15-second "elevator speech" you've heard about, RoAne says. "In less than nine seconds you should give the benefit of what you do, but not the title. If you say something like 'I make sure people have a roof over their heads,' it will arouse curiosity and encourage them to ask a question." It's also a good idea to link your self-introduction to the event, RoAne adds.

#### **5. Focus on the other person.**

Studies show that when you ask people questions about themselves, they come away from the conversation with a more favorable impression of you. Then again, don't play 20 questions. If they aren't interested in engaging at all, have a polite exit strategy and move on. And remember, if you are uncomfortable talking with strangers, your new contact may be just as uncomfortable.

#### **6. Stoke the ego, but don't suck up.**

It's a fine line between expressing admiration and being obsequious. If you want to give a compliment, whether it's on someone's shoes or their recently published article, try to be genuine and don't gush. If you're not sure how to use flattery well, practice with a friend who can give you feedback.

Good schmoozing opens the possibility of future contact. If a conversation goes well, ask for a business card. If the other person doesn't want to be contacted, don't take it personally. If they provide their information, send a quick, conversational email two days later to remind them about your conversation, RoAne says.

"Then you can ask politely for a small favor," she adds. "You can say, 'I've been interested in learning more about X, and I would love to hear from you if you have some ideas.' A request like that is not big enough to put them on the defensive."