

7 ways to Leverage 60 Seconds

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People often look at *networking* as a tired term, but it can be your stepping stone to greater influence, recognition, and ultimately, referrals. When meeting someone new, here are 7 proven steps to improve your networking ability:

1. Introduce yourself clearly and concisely.

Though this may seem obvious, it is often overlooked or done poorly. First, say your name and company, then ask for the same from your listener.

2. Be specific about your line of work.

Don't say, "I'm in computers," or, "I'm in travel." Instead, be specific. For example, "My firm specializes in local area networks for the real estate industry." Or, "We focus on the lowest possible fares for law firms that fly their lawyers on short notice, and we can get them waivers and favors to reduce their bottom lines."

3. Organize your introduction.

Prepare a 15-second opening statement that describes what you do. If your product or service is technical or hard to explain, begin with a 15- to 20-second story that illustrates what you do. Stories help create and maintain listener interest.

4. Inform, don't sell.

Don't come on with a sales pitch. When in doubt, remember a low-key introduction is always better.

5. Be yourself.

Not being yourself can make you look silly, artificial, or worse. Learn what makes people receptive and master that. There is no substitute for authenticity.

6. Be an avid listener.

When someone else is speaking, it's tempting to be thinking of your response. But careful listening builds goodwill, trust, and confidence.

7. Follow-up.

Always send a personal note to follow-up your conversations. It is unlikely your listener will need your product or service immediately. But don't be surprised when they make the call and say, "I really appreciated your note when we met last."

You have only one chance at a first impression. An effective networker can't afford to waste that opportunity.