



Fort Collins Chamber Networking Tips *Building Your Business One Conversation at a Time*

Develop a Networking Plan - Your overall networking plan in a community should encompass programs big and small where you can make meaningful **connections** versus standard introductions. Be sure to vary the formats so you can gain branding exposure (large events) as well as having time to develop deeper relationships (small events). Consider committee involvement, volunteering and Leads groups in addition to your social media networking plan. Contact the Chamber to discuss the various programs and events offered. Your Chamber representative can also help build a custom and realistic plan for networking that meets your needs.

Choosing networking programs - When you are looking at programs that meet on a regular basis, choose one or two programs and be consistent with attendance to remain “top of mind” and establish loyalty. It is better to join even one committee and attend regularly rather than getting involved in multiple programs that you can’t fit into your schedule. Once you find a group that meets your goals and you’ve made connections, offer to serve on a committee.

Preparation - You should prepare for a networking event in the same way you would prepare for a job interview or client presentation. Before the event, devote a little time to thinking about your objective so you can build more **PURPOSEFUL** connections. Are you looking for new clients? To enhance relationships with current customers? Are you looking for suggestions on a business challenge? Is there a particular vendor you are in need of? Be sure to also take time to consider the profiles of the attendees and how **you might help them**. Contact the hosting organization if you aren’t sure what the attendee profile looks like. Don’t talk on the phone all the way and race out of the car without any thought to *why* you are going to the event. Be sure to remember your nametag.

Elevator speech - What makes you different? An elevator speech should not be a listing of your products and services. It should include a statement about what **differentiates you from others**. Give industry tips instead of a

list of your offerings. This is appropriate for roundtable networking introductions also (Leads groups etc...)

Check the nametag table at registration - Who is coming that you really want to meet? Set a goal to introduce yourself to that person.

Conversations at an Event - Start a conversation by taking an interest in others' businesses, comment on their business name, ask questions. Do not dominate the conversation. **If you are the only one talking you're presenting, not having a two-way conversation.** If you can do so naturally in the conversation, add value to your fellow participant's experience by inserting a few industry tips or trends.

Be sure to give others your full attention. Don't be the person looking around the room while someone is talking to you but also don't be the person people are trying to get away from. 5-7 minutes of conversation is usually enough before you trade business cards and excuse yourself.

2 or 3 conversation rule - If you have 2 or 3 **quality** conversations, that is better than 30 meaningless interactions (unless you have a "branding" purpose for an event). Seventy-five percent of your time should be with people you don't know (unless you have another specific objective).

Break into a group at a "mixer" networking event. Most regular attendees are there to meet the **new** attendees! Although it might look like you are interrupting, you are making their networking easier!

Back to Basics - Good breath, polite eating (don't come starving - you'll focus too much on the food and not the people), don't be a "close talker" and read non-verbal cues if someone is done with the conversation, excuse yourself.

Post Event Follow Up - Write distinguishing features on others' business cards **immediately** after the event (even in your car) to help you remember people upon follow up. This **MUST** be completed within a few hours or you will forget the details. For example.."green hat, daughter went to CSU, loves horses etc."

Follow Up - You **MUST** contact within 48 hours of the event! Ask to meet via phone or email if there is potential while the conversation is still fresh.

Thank you cards or personal note - If you decide to write a thank you card or personal note to someone you met networking, handwritten is more

effective than an email. We all remember people who took the time to write us a handwritten card. A thank you note should ONLY be a thank you, resist the temptation to insert a sentence about your offering (future contacts will be more appropriate for selling).

Tradeshow Tip - If you are working trade shows - don't sit down at your table EVER! Wear comfortable shoes and stand in front of or next to your booth so you look welcoming for walk-through traffic. Don't waste your show investment by sitting at your booth all day.

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