

# UNSTUCK ADVICE

Live better every day

## 25 ways to make networking less dreadful

By Unstuck



***Stuck moment:** I know this so-called networking event tonight is important for my career, but I'm not going to get anything out of it. I never meet the right people. And it always seems like everyone knows people there already — what am I suppose to do, just barge into a conversation with strangers? I hate this.*

\* \* \*

There's no shortage of people who detest networking, and no shortage of reasons why: *It feels artificial. I have better things to do with my time. I never know what to say. It's boring. It's exhausting. There's nothing in it for me.*

All of these reasons are valid — and if we peek under the covers we'll find the singular core: We're afraid. Of being rejected, of failing, of not being up to snuff. Everyone feels it, even those super-smiley glad-handers we know we'll never be. On top of that, [research shows](#) that the insincerity of networking can literally give us the heebie-jeebies. The tempting choice is to reject networking (*It's just not for me*). The courageous choice is to try to push through the fear.

Don't worry, we're not about to spend hundreds of words saying “just do it” because we know you won't. Neither would we. Instead, we've rustled up an assortment of tactics so you can pick the ones that best suit your style. But first...

### Why network?

Banish thoughts of deal-making and job-finding. The primary point of networking is mutual problem-solving. People come bearing all kinds of needs (as do you). Those same people also hold within them inspiration and ideas and support that may not exist in your circle of contacts (and vice versa). When you connect with someone new, you begin a relationship that, if nurtured, can be fruitful for both sides.

Okay, we admit that doesn't always happen. We all have to kiss our fair share of frogs. But consider the alternative: No new relationships, no new ideas, same old problems.

### TIME FOR A CHANGE

Our NEW POSSIBILITIES KIT makes it possible



Explore now

### TRIED AND TRUE WAYS TO GET UNSTUCK

- + Adapt fresh **perspectives**
- + Expand your **empathy**
- + Lead with **gratitude**
- + Welcome **play** into your life
- + Work like a **human**

### I'M FEELING STUCK BECAUSE...

- + I don't know **what I want**
- + I don't want to **fail**
- + I keep **delaying**
- + I won't **speak up**
- + I'm **over** my head
- + I'm not **confident**
- + I'm **creatively** blocked
- + I'm **unmotivated**
- + I'm in a **negative** loop
- + It's a **relationship** thing
- + **Work** sucks
- + Life is **chaotic**
- + Something's **changed**
- + Something's **not right**
- + **Starting over** is hard

### 11 WAYS WE GET STUCK

Let's make sure that isn't your future.

### Change your mind

Consider one or more of these networking truths days before you go to an event.

According to the book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking* by Susan Cain, this kind of self-talk can suppress fear. But if you do nothing else, stop imagining how things will go, good or bad.

1. People want to meet you. That's why they're there.
2. You don't have to sparkle or make 20 or 10 or even five new acquaintances (one would be nice).
3. You have something to offer. A good joke. A sympathetic ear. Directions to the restroom. These all count.
4. You don't have to talk business. It's about meeting interesting people who might become a friend.
5. Not every conversation has to be meaningful. Small talk is a way of testing the waters to see if there is a deeper connection. Sometimes there isn't.
6. You aren't walking into a trap. This is a choice you are making to expand your world.

### Select where and how you mingle

Networking doesn't have to happen in a hotel ballroom with name tags and beverages in plastic cups. You can network anywhere there are other people. Take to heart the Free Trait Theory, which says that when we care deeply about something, we willingly act out of character in service of what we care about. In other words, pick something you're passionate about and see how much easier it is to meet people. Here are some suggestions.

7. Meetup is a great way to do something you love with other people. Play soccer, go hiking, talk about cyber security. The choices seem infinite.
8. Join a carpool to get to know your coworkers better.
9. Volunteer at a networking event, which gives you purpose and a reason to engage with people.
10. Take a class or workshop. The camaraderie of being in it together makes it easier to bond with others.
11. Volunteer for a cause you care about. Volunteermatch.org puts people and nonprofits together in 100 U.S. cities.
12. Join a sports league or book club or quilting circle. After the initial meeting, you'll be a recognized member of the group.
13. Take your dog (or a friend's) to the local dog park. There's something about pet-ownership that brings out the friendliness in people.
14. Strike up a conversation with people you don't know well at the office birthday and holiday parties. You already have a common topic: work.
15. Reconnect with former colleagues you've lost touch with. You never know what you'll learn while catching up.
16. Ask a well-connected friend to introduce you to someone you'd like to meet or

- + **Tunnel Visionary:** blinded to new possibilities
- + **Deflated Doer:** feeling unmotivated
- + **Drifter:** feeling directionless
- + **Waffler:** unable to decide
- + **Reluctant Adapter:** resisting change
- + **Idle Achiever:** stalled by the details
- + **Fuzzy Forecaster:** unable to see the vision clearly
- + **Ad Libber:** operating without a plan
- + **Perplexed Planner:** caught in what is instead of what could be
- + **Lone Leader:** not asking for help
- + **Avoider:** painfully procrastinating

invite you to an event he's attending.

### Prepare to engage

Before you head out to turn a few strangers into friends, get yourself ready. There are known tactics that help us make a good first impression, as well as pointers on what to do after "hello." The one unbendable rule: Smile (like you mean it).

17. If a crowd of strangers freaks you out, arrive on the early side before the whole crew gets there. If so inclined, offer to help the host with last-minute details and you'll already have one new friend.

18. You arrive and things are in full swing. Don't feel pressure to plunge in. Take a few deep breaths and give yourself time to assess the situation.

19. Dress in a way that makes you feel good about yourself. You'll look and be more confident.

20. Mom was right: Stand up straight. Smile. Make eye contact.

21. Have a ready answer for the often-asked question: What do you do? You want to be articulate about who you are and what you're passionate about — in 30 seconds or less.

22. Introduce yourself to other folks on their own. Smile, say "hi," tell them your name, and ask if you can join them. Simple, genuine, and effective.

23. Here are a couple offbeat ways to [make small talk more meaningful](#) from *Inc.* magazine.

24. Show your generous side: Offer to help. Make an introduction. Give a (sincere) compliment. Actively listen.

25. Ask questions about the other person. Personal interests are fine. Think of them as a friend you're getting to know, not a colleague you have to impress.

In the end, there's sweet relief — and maybe a confidence boost. You went, you met, you mingled. The only thing better is following up with anyone who you'd like to get to know within the next three days.



#### What's stopping you?

End your procrastinating ways with Unstuck's Stop Your Procrastination Tip Card deck. It's one of the best habits you can break.

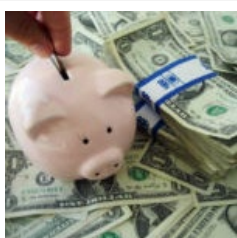
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