

For Successful Networking, Bring Out Your Smile (472 words)

By Bonnie Budzowski
President, InCredible Messages, LP

Networking, like going to high school dances, brings out insecurity, even in people who are typically confident. Perhaps this is because, in both situations, we feel we are being measured unfairly. We know these are artificial situations in which there is no room for our best selves to shine through.

Fortunately, the networking that takes place in a room full of strangers is not the only route to networking, any more than a high school dance is the only route to dating. If you don't like large group settings, build most of your connections over coffee or lunch with one or two people at a time.

When you must get involved in a large room, balancing a flimsy paper plate while talking with strangers, remember to keep your sense of humor about you—literally. Evidence indicating that our moods impact the way others perceive us is growing. Some scientists believe that facial expressions, including smiles, have played an important role in evolution, as our ancestors needed to quickly assess whether an approaching person was friend or foe.

Centuries later, we still make remarkably quick assessments about others. This is certainly true when we are in a networking situation with strangers. When someone meets our glance with a warm smile, we smile back, almost involuntarily. Without necessarily being conscious of it, we mark that person as desirable or even trustworthy. To make your best impression at a networking event, cultivate your smile.

Use your creativity to convey a playful tone, perhaps with a light comment in the buffet line, and you'll find that people are glad to talk with you. I'm not suggesting you come prepared to tell jokes. However, if you focus on the light side of whatever situation you are in, you are likely to evoke a chuckle from the people around you. When that happens, you build a connection that allows you to follow up in a more natural environment. If you think I'm exaggerating, note the following quote from *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence*:

In a neurological sense, laughing represents the shortest distance between two people because it instantly interlocks limbic [emotional] systems. This immediate involuntary reaction, as one researcher puts it, involves "the most direct communication possible between people—brain to brain—with our intellect just going along for the ride...."

inCredible Messages

Using Influence and Credibility to Move Business Forward

I don't know how things went for you at high school dances. I do know this: You don't have to be a wallflower at your next networking event. Just take a deep breath. Then smile.

© 2006 by Bonnie Budzowski, InCredible Messages, LP



Permission is granted to reprint this article when the following contact information is included: © 2006 by Bonnie Budzowski, President of InCredible Messages, LP. For more free articles, go to www.IncredibleMessages.com or contact Bonnie at info@IncredibleMessages.com.