Four Social Skills You Need for Successful Networking

When you leave a networking event, do you walk away feeling like you nailed it or like you just wasted two hours of your precious time? If you chose the latter, poor social skills may be keeping you from winning at the networking game. Here are four social skills that every attorney needs for networking success.

Eye Contact

Have you ever tried having a conversation with someone whose eyes are on everything in the room, but you? It makes for an uncomfortable and irritating experience. Don't be that person. Eye contact lets people know that you are paying attention to what they are saying. While avoiding eye contact is often seen as a sign of deceit of untrustworthiness. Now, I'm not suggesting that you stare anyone down while they are talking. That's just creepy. But naturally meeting a person's gaze during conversation is a great way to demonstrate confidence and focus.

Listening

I hope you have seen the viral video of the little boy pleading with his mom to "Listen, Linda! Listen!" If you haven't, you must take a moment to check it out here. It's hilarious, right? But that little guy is also offering you some valuable advice.

Listening is one of the most effective social skills you can master. Not only does it demonstrate your interest in the conversation, but it also provides an opportunity for you to learn something beneficial for yourself and your practice. What if you zone out in the middle of a conversation and miss the other party's need for a good transactional lawyer… or what if you were listening to a more interesting conversation across the room and failed to

answer a question about your firm? Neither of these scenarios reflect well on your law practice.

If you really want to up your game, practice active active listening. It's pretty simple and there are only four steps involved: hearing, interpreting, evaluating, and responding.

Learn Names

One of the greatest skills you can master in life is learning people's names and using them in conversation. People like to feel memorable and the best way to trample all over that feeling is to forget a name. It not only makes you appear uninterested, but it can also come off as unprofessional and disrespectful. In his book, How to Win Friends and Influence People, Dale Carnegie wrote "A person's nameis to him or her the sweetest and most important sound in any language."He's right and your inability or unwillingness to remember that name can hinder a potentially lucrative professional relationship.

If you really struggle in this area, this Forbes Magazine article provides some tricks for mastering this skill. Put some into practice and before long, you'll know the names of everyone in the room.

Master the Perfect Ending

Ending the conversation correctly is just as important as starting it off right. It may be your last chance to make a good impression and you want to take full advantage. If appropriate, open the door for further discussion down the line. Exchange business cards or cell phone numbers. You may even want to get a meeting date on the calendar. If you feel that this new contact is someone you need to keep in contact with, don't end the conversation without tactfully suggesting future correspondence.

Just as importantly though, it's important not to let your enthusiasm turn into stalker behavior. If the other person isn't receptive to speaking further, don't push the subject. He or she may find your actions offensive. Just offer some positive parting words, like "It was great speaking with you" or "Good luck in your endeavors" and exit stage left.

About Erika Winston:

Erika Winston is a freelance writer with a passion for law. Through her business, The Legal Writing Studio, she helps legal professionals deliver effective written messages. Erika is a regular contributor to TimeSolv and a variety of other publications.