

The logo for King's Venues, featuring the words "KING'S" and "VENUES" in a bold, white, sans-serif font stacked vertically within a solid red square.

KING'S VENUES

The King's Venues' Guide to Networking

Some take to it like a duck to water, but for many of us, networking at an event is a daunting prospect. Dry mouth, sweaty palms, a tendency to turn to the free bar for emotional support – any of this sound familiar?

But networking is something everyone can do, and do really well, it's just a case of understanding the rules of the game. Read our simple how-to guide and learn how to play it like a pro.

Your entrance

You've arrived at an event, you're flying solo, how on earth do you begin to mingle? Well, you want to be on alert for two things – someone you know, or someone else on their own. Finding a friend or an acquaintance will give you the chance to warm up your chat and anchor you with someone to turn to if you find yourself adrift. It also never hurts to re-establish an old connection. Even better is to find a fellow guest who is also on their own. As well as giving you a new contact and someone to talk to, you're helping someone else out who will become an ally for the evening.

Heading for the bar is also a good entry tactic. Ordering a drink is a task often undertaken alone, so even guests who know dozens of people in the room will have to break away from the pack, giving you a chance to strike up conversation. Even if the bar is deserted, waiting for your drink will give you an opportunity to survey the room from a safe vantage point while you decide who to approach. Don't forget, the person behind the bar may be a fantastic contact too and a likely candidate for a first conversation.

The bar

While we're talking about the bar, it's a good time to add in a little warning about alcohol. A little Dutch courage is a common networking policy, but if you're in a professional environment, make sure your glass of Pinot doesn't turn into a bottle. You might meet a future client or your next boss at any moment and you'll want to be in a position to present your best self.

It's not all about you

One of the best ways to make a great first impression is to think about what you can do to help someone else before you start questioning what they can do for you. Think of a networking occasion as you would any other social situation in the 'real world'. In other words, be nice! Can you introduce your new contact to anyone who could help them?

Approaching a group

If you've had the confidence to walk up to a group of people you don't know who are mid-conversation, make sure you enter the discussion by asking a question rather than offering an

opinion. You may think your take on the current political crisis in the Middle East is insightful and thought provoking, but as the newbie in the confab you need to earn your stripes and wait to be invited to offer your view.

It's the little things

As clichéd as it may sound, never underestimate the power of a smile. If you catch a stranger's eye, smile. You don't need to walk around like a grinning fool all evening, but a polite, half-smile (no teeth) says 'I'm friendly and approachable if you want to chat.' It's also a good way of making someone else who is talking feel at ease. It shows you're listening and agreeing to what they say and will help create a bond between you in a group conversation.

Listening is also key to networking successfully. This doesn't mean quietly biding your time, waiting for someone to finish so you can put in your tuppence worth, but *really* listening. Let your mind follow the talker's thought process and take in what they're saying with sincerity.

It's a nice touch to try and use someone's name when you're talking to them. 'That's really interesting Mark, I'd never thought about it like that.' It shows you were actually listening when they introduced themselves and this personal touch will really help 'Mark' remember you.

The awkward silence

We've all been there. You've exchanged pleasantries with someone and your mind goes blank. No words will come out of your mouth and the tumbleweed bounces past. Your new potential contact is looking over your shoulder ready to move on – help! This is when some pre-prepared questions will come in handy.

'So, did you read that article about X in Y Magazine?'

It doesn't even need to be a work-related question. You could mention a poster for a new book you'd seen on the tube on the way to the event from an author you like – does your new contact like their work? So long as you choose a few questions on general topics you're confident talking about you can't go wrong.

Contact details

Don't forget to take your business cards with you. If you want to exchange contact details with someone, ask for their card first so it doesn't feel as though you're pushing yourself on them.

Follow up

Making new contacts at an event is all very well, but don't rest on your laurels just because you've bagged a few business cards. Re-affirm any general connections within a few days of the original meeting with a short 'it was lovely to meet you' type email. If there's any immediate potential for business to be done, make sure your follow up is made by phone call.

Make sure you follow @kingsvenues for your weekly #howtonetwork tips.