

Networking for the Introvert

By Joe Rosenlicht

Being an introvert myself, it's especially gratifying when I can help my introverted clients gain an edge wherever possible. We live in a world that favors extroversion, and when it comes to networking, many introverts feel at a disadvantage. But there are strategies and approaches that we can use to be on a more level playing field with our extroverted counterparts.

Before getting into these strategies, I wanted to point out some common misconceptions about introverts. One of the most common is that we are by definition shy and unsociable wallflowers. But these traits are really unrelated to introversion. The true definition has to do with where we derive our energy. Introverts tend to feel anxious if faced with a string of social or professional events in a short amount of time. So to address this anxiety, we need to "recharge" our batteries more often by having more "alone" time. We derive our energy from within ourselves vs. from other people (as is the case with extroverts.)

Another myth is that we comprise only a tiny percentage of the world, but in fact approximately 25% of the population falls into the introvert category. Finally, many people believe that it is a learned behavior, but actually there is much evidence suggesting a biological basis for introversion. In other words, people are more or less "hard-wired" to be introverts or extroverts. But that's not to say that even strong introverts aren't able to exhibit extrovert-like behavior on occasion, and vice-versa.

In addition to taking time to recharge, there are numerous strategies to make networking a more positive, productive and enjoyable experience. For example:

- Bring a friend to an event, but agree to separate for at least part of the time. This forces you to interact with others, but it can help reduce your anxiety level.
- Commit to a certain number of networking activities each day (or each week.) Reward yourself for meeting or exceeding whatever goal you set for yourself.
- Consider letter writing as an alternative to phone calls. And don't underestimate the power of virtual networking on such sites as [linkedin](#) and [facebook](#). LinkedIn, for example, is designed to do much of the legwork that you would normally do in a more traditional networking situation. But don't rely solely on virtual networking. A combination is ideal.
- Pace yourself. Don't try to schedule a full day of networking activities if you're attending an event that evening.
- If breaking the ice is a challenge for you, just remember to keep it simple: for example, talking about the weather or offering a compliment can be effective ways to get a conversation going.
- And most importantly, RELAX! If you're fearful of approaching others at a networking event, keep in mind that chances are everyone there has some degree of fear (even extroverts!), as well as a desire to approach you

For more about this topic, read [The Introvert Advantage: How to Thrive in an Extrovert World](#), by Marti Olsen Laney. The book discusses the unique traits of introverts and the valuable contributions we make to the world. Another useful book is [How to Start a Conversation and Make Friends](#), by Don Gabor.

Joe Rosenlicht is a certified leadership coach and founder of InMotion Career & Wellness, based in Washington, DC. Through his coaching, he keeps clients moving forward in achieving career happiness, including transitioning into new jobs, writing winning resumes, doing effective job searches, interviewing and networking more powerfully, and answering the question, "What do I *really* want to do for a living?" He also coaches on wellness issues and is licensed to offer [The Wellness Inventory](#), a unique self assessment and life balance program. Joe's a featured columnist on various business and career websites as well as a marketing consultant for other entrepreneurs. For free valuable resources and tips, visit www.inmotioncoach.com and subscribe to *Making Waves*, his monthly newsletter.