

**Working the Room**  
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When asked what skill most enabled their achievements, many successful people respond, “the ability to converse.”

In order to be successful, you must be able to do this, whether you think it’s easy or hard.

Here are some tips to help you “work a room.”

1. Plan ahead:
  - a. If you are going to a reception or a cash bar, think about who will be there.
  - b. Try to find a list of attendees.
  - c. Will your advisors, people in your field, or people at schools to which you’ve applied be there?
  - d. If it’s easy to ask, ask someone to introduce you.
  - e. If you are planning to speak with someone who gave a paper earlier in the conference, make sure you go to his or her talk.
  - f. You should identify room location in advance.
2. At professional meetings, introduce yourself:
  - a. Prepare this in advance—it’s a brief “elevator” introduction.
  - b. Some say that it helps to say your name last, as people often remember the last thing that you say.
  - c. You should also have a prepared, two-minute introduction. This would serve as a response to the question, “tell me about yourself,” that is often asked in interviews.
3. How to present yourself:
  - a. It is better to be overdressed than underdressed, but be comfortable. Break in your nice clothes a bit before you wear them to an event.
  - b. Don’t arrive too early. It’s hard to work a room when you are the only person in it.
  - c. Keep your hands free. Don’t bring a lot of stuff.
  - d. Check your coat and your backpack/bag, if a coat check is available.
  - e. Carry a small notebook and a pen, or a PDA to jot down information.
  - f. Wear a name tag.
4. How to socialize
  - a. If you bring a friend, don’t stay with your friend too long.
  - b. Look around, see who’s there. Get your bearings.
  - c. Warm up by talking to another person who is there alone
  - d. Join a group—this is easy if you know someone, harder if you don’t. Make sure you aren’t breaking in on a private conversation.
  - e. Hold yourself with confidence. Make eye contact. Use a firm handshake.
  - f. Listen more than you speak.

- g. Use small talk to break the ice. Talk about the food—it can be a great equalizer. Small talk can lead to big talk.
- h. Know how much you can drink, and do not exceed that limit.
- i. Don't look around the room when you are talking to someone.
- j. Don't talk for more than 10 minutes. Then, say that you've enjoyed talking to someone and extricate yourself politely. Say that you want to get a drink/food, for example.
- k. Introduce junior people to senior people first, i.e. "President Gutmann, let me introduce you to Jane Smith, an assistant professor in the English department."
- l. Be polite, be positive. Don't gossip. Enjoy the experience.
- m. Know when to leave. When you do, thank the host, the chair, or the organizer and leave confidently.
- n. If it's appropriate, you could follow up with an email or a "gracious note."

In general, think about the following questions:

What connects you to people?

How do you want to be remembered?

What can you give to them?