

1. Calling it in.

At its best, networking is done face to face. In an age when technology allows us to do nearly everything online, we need to remember there's no substitute for getting out there and introducing yourself to someone in person. When you meet people, you get a better read on who they really are. Even if you feel you won't be good at networking events, challenge yourself to get out there. Even if you talk to only one or two people, try to find common ground. However awkward you feel at first, with practice you'll soon become much more at ease.

2. Treating networking as a one-way street.

People may be connecting with you because they're genuinely interested in your ideas, but they're also there because they want you to listen to what they have to say. So don't hog the conversation. Networking is about building mutual relationships, and there's no room for one-sided domination. Meet someone, get to know them, and let them learn to trust you and like you. That's what networking is all about.

3. Taking before you give.

It's tempting to think of networking as a chance to make a pitch: *I'll find five people in the room and tell them what I need, and then I'll get it.* But networking is built on give-and-take, and give always comes first. Start by noting who you'd like to meet. Then do some research if necessary and think of ways you can support and help them. Work on developing a relationship. When you do, you position yourself among successful people whose influence can help you go far. Build a reputation for being helpful in your network, and people will be keen to help you in turn. Answer when people ask for help, then go further to discover what they need and provide it proactively.

4. Focusing on quantity over quality.

Too many people treat networking as a numbers game, collecting contact information without getting to know anyone. This is a mistake I see over and over again. People act as if there were a prize for the one who collects the most cards or connections. But the real prize goes to the person who's able to make the most genuine connection, engage in the most relevant conversations, and create a memorable impression.

5. Failing to follow up.

This is the biggest and most common mistake of all: You go to an event and make some great connections, but you let them fade away without acting on them.

Following up is the key to networking; without it, attending events and fostering connections is a waste of time. Create a specific plan for following up, and do your part to steer promising new relationships toward mutually beneficial territory. Failing to follow up means a missed opportunity to develop a potentially meaningful and profitable connection.

Done right, networking is about building relationships and connecting. It should always be about giving before you receive and learning before you speak.