

CONTRIBUTOR

# Network Like a Ninja

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Networking is second nature to some, but it fills others with dread. For these people, a little structure can go a long way toward helping diminish the dread. After all, networking is much more than cocktail parties and trading business cards. Professionals who do it well can generate millions in revenue for their companies.

First, **do your homework** before attending an event. To find out who will there, Google last year's event to find pictures and articles. If it's a fundraiser, the people who were there last year are likely to be there again this year. Charity

events are also great because the organization's board of directors will be well represented.

Now go to sites like LinkedIn and Facebook to find out more about the people you want to meet. What are their hobbies? Do they have children? Where did they go to college? As you commit the intel to memory, make sure you don't mix things up. You probably don't want to lead with, "How about those Trojans?" if the person is a Stanford grad.

Next, **be fearless**. If your first thought is "But I don't know anyone," stop and think: that's not an excuse, it's an opportunity. We're afraid of what we don't know, but the homework minimizes that fear. Once at the event, screw up your courage, walk right up to a prospect, and introduce yourself. Use your intel to warm up the conversation — the ideal scenario is that you have something in common.

If you happen upon someone who wasn't part of your homework, you have a fallback tactic: your smartphone. Get the person's name, exchange pleasantries, and move on. You can circle back in a while. But before you do, check out that person online. You might be surprised — maybe both of you have kids who play softball at the YMCA. Small world!

If you go with a colleague, you can tag team. True story, fake names: two executives, Jackie and Jeff, went to an event. Jackie wanted to connect with a particular entrepreneur, Carla, but couldn't remember if she had met Carla before. Jeff definitely had NOT met her, so Jackie went to the restroom while Jeff introduced himself to Carla. After a few minutes Jeff rendezvoused with Jackie, gave her the 411, and Jackie was off to shake Carla's hand.

**Find the Octopus.** There always are one or two people "holding court," surrounded by eight people — an octopus. When you connect with the octopus,

you automatically connect with eight more people (at least). By the way, if for some reason it's not appropriate to ask for a business card, be sure to record the person's name, such as on your smartphone.

**Follow up** after the event. Congratulate yourself on overcoming those fears and making contacts, but you're not done yet. The next day, enter those contacts in your CRM. Send them an invitation to connect on LinkedIn. Follow that with an InMail or email saying how nice it was to meet them.

So far we've been talking about people who are "newbies" to networking. However, if you're already super-networker, you might consider taking it up a notch and becoming an **über-networker**. Put yourself out there as a subject matter expert and book some speaking engagements. The registration list for that engagement adds dozens to your network.

With a little planning, networking becomes easy. Keep at it, and in no time you'll be networking like a ninja.

*Kim Shepherd contributed to this article.*

[Kim Shepherd](#) joined [Decision Toolbox](#), a 100 percent virtual organization providing recruitment solutions in 2000 as CEO. Today, she leads the company's growth strategy, primarily through developing partnerships and alliances, and as an active member of the Los Angeles and Orange County human resources communities. A recognized thought leader by HR organizations nationwide, Kim regularly speaks on topics such as recruitment best practices, recruitment process outsourcing and the virtual business. She authored *The Bite Me School of Management*, a book journaling her business journey and the challenges she has overcome, and *Get Scrappy*, a business book that provides a new perspective on personal and corporate growth. Learn more at [dtoolbox.com](http://dtoolbox.com).