



Make contacts and develop business

101 St George's Tce, PERTH WA PO Box 693 CLAREMONT WA 6910 ABN 53 080 023 052
Phone: (08) 9284 2464 Fax: 6210 1166 Mobile: 0413 420 538 Email: gonetworking@iinet.net.au www.gonetworking.com.au

CLASSIC NETWORKING QUESTIONS

After you have said hello and broken the ice with a new contact by way of some small talk about the situation, location, occasion you are sharing together, it's time to weave a few strategic information gathering questions into the conversation — questions to find out what's going on in their world, questions that get them talking about themselves, questions to help you find out how you can “serve” them, questions that build rapport and lay the foundations of trust. This will help you make every encounter and every event a productive networking experience.

Warning: Don't be too hasty in thinking the person you're sitting next to at a breakfast meeting or someone who approaches you at a business mixer isn't worth knowing. You never know who your new acquaintance knows. Never assume that someone you meet doesn't know just the right person to refer/introduce you to.

1. So Bob, what do you do for a living? Tell me about the work you do Bob. What is it you do? What do you like most about that? What are your responsibilities?
2. What's your speciality/field of expertise? In what ways/how do you help/work with/add value to your clients? What's going on in your business these days? Can you help me understand what's happening in your world/business these days? How do you truly benefit your clients/customers?
3. How did you get your start in the widget business? What sparked your interest in widgets/banking/the law, etc? What was it in your background that lead you to a career in? How did you develop the idea for your business?
4. What's it like doing your job these days? What do you enjoy most about your job/profession/running your own business? Of what success during the past twelve months are most proud?
5. So, you've been in business for 20 years? How did you succeed for so long? What would you say is the secret to running a successful business? What are your KPIs? Going back, what really launched your business/career? If you could give me one piece of advice on (whatever), what would that be? What trends do you see coming in your profession/industry? How has your business/industry/profession changed in the last few years?
6. Bob, what do you sell? Tell me about the products/services you offer. What new projects are you working on? What new products/services are you planning to bring to the market? What is it about your product/the work you do that's different from anybody else? How are you different from your competitors?
7. May I ask, who are your major clients/customers? Tell me about the kind of clients/customers you like to do business with. What's your target audience? What sort of company/individual makes the best client/customer for you? What market segments do you target with your offerings?

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8. Do you need more customers? What type of customers do you want? Who makes a “good fit” client for you?
9. What is a good business opportunity for you? What would be a good referral for you? How can I know if someone I’m talking to is a good prospect for you? Do you have a list of companies/targets you’d like to do business with? Like who for example? Who’s on your list? What kind of individuals make good referral sources for you? How would I recognise a good prospect for you? What does success look like for your business?

Important: If you want the speaker to continue or elaborate, if you want to know more, ask follow-up questions. Will you give me an example? Why/How is that important to you? Why do you think that? I’m interested, please tell me more. Can you explain that? Remember the more you know about the speaker, the better you can serve/help him/her.

10. What do you buy? Tell me about the kinds of products/services you source for your business. What services do you outsource for your business?
11. Who are your major service providers/suppliers?
12. In regard to what you buy/outsource, are you fully satisfied with the products/service you are receiving? Are you in need of new sources of supply/service providers? What types of suppliers do you need? What type of products/services that you need are you having trouble sourcing in the market place? What are your expectations of suppliers to your business? What does good service mean to you? What does it take to make you happy/lose confidence in suppliers?
13. Does your accountant/bank/printer etc refer business to you?

In networking, you get back what you give. And you can’t give a lot unless you make the effort to understand your contact’s needs and wants, hopes and dreams, worries and concerns, problems and issues, and become tuned in to their views, principles, goals and ambitions. Once you understand these and provide answers/solutions more readily, more obviously than anyone else, then business and social success are yours.

Focussing on how you can help others in order to help yourself is a fundamental shift in perception that differentiates the real networkers from the rest.

14. What’s the biggest challenge you face in running your business/company/firm these days? What are the five top issues on your plate right now? What’s your most important desire? What kind of pressure do you find yourself under these days in running your business/practice/department? What’s holding you/your business back from reaching your revenue goals/making more money? What don’t you have time for? What keeps you up at night? What are your goals for your business/career? What are your (business) priorities at the moment? What are you committed to achieving in your business this year? In the best of all possible worlds, what do you think you could do with your business? What are your problems? What problems are you facing today? What’s your most pressing need? What concerns you most about your business/career/profession/industry? What are the critical issues facing your industry/profession today? What frustrates you most about your career/business/industry? What’s your greatest fear in regard to your business? If you had a magic wand, what problem would you solve right now to improve your business?

15. Tell me how the current situation is worrisome to you? Why/How is that a problem for you? What are the consequences if this problem continues unsolved? How important to you is it to find a solution to this problem? How much is this problem costing you? How much money will it cost you to go without a solution to this problem? If I can fix that for you, would you like to discuss the solution with me?
16. What are you doing that's new in your business? What's something different you've tried in your business recently that's paying off? How do you market your products/services?
17. What business/professional groups/organizations do you belong to? Who, in your opinion, are the people of real influence in your industry/profession?
18. What industry/trade publications do you read?
19. Is there anybody in particular here tonight/today that you'd like to meet? Why him/her? Would you like me to introduce you?

When you think the time is right, casually ask a few carefully phrased questions about the individual's specific needs as they relate to your product or service.....

20. Are you familiar with our products/the services we offer? Are you familiar with our company and how we benefit our clients? May I explain? (Keep it brief!) Let me tell you about our firm. Let me tell you what I do and how I make life easier for my customers. (Keep it brief!) Would you like to know something about the products/services we offer? Would you like to know our points of difference? Would you like to know the economic benefits our products/services bring?
21. Who do you know in your industry/building/neighbourhood/association who might benefit from our products/services?
22. Do you see/think/feel there is a need for the kind of service I offer in your company? Do you need some help in this area? Do you think I could be of help to you/your organization? Would you be interested to explore some ways and options we might be able to work together? Is there anything I've just mentioned that you'd like to discuss further? Can I pop by your office sometime to discuss how I could be of help to you?/how we might be able to help each other do more business? I'm sure I could help fix that problem for you. Can I shout you coffee sometime and explain how? You mentioned earlier that..... I have a potential solution to your problem. Can I call you and arrange a time for us to get together? Do you have a business card?
23. Would you ever consider switching suppliers? Would you ever consider using another accountant/lawyer/whatever?
24. If you're interested, I have some thoughts on how you might ease those concerns/solve that problem. What say we have coffee sometime? Well, why don't we get together sometime?
25. If I can solve that problem/concern for you, would you be interested? When could we get together and talk? If I could show you the economic benefits you would get from our solution/the work we do, would you be interested? Assuming I can do that for you/solve that concern, would you be interested to talk? Can I/we try to find a solution for you that cost less than the problem?

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26. Does your bank/financial planner/accountant (whatever you do) regularly send you business? I have many clients who are likely to buy from you. Would you like to meet up sometime to talk about how I could help you expand your client base?

Get to know people in ways that have nothing to do with business. Get to know them as “people”. They will appreciate it. They will like you for doing this. If your attitude is strictly business, you are probably missing opportunities to find common ground — perhaps a shared interest or experience or maybe a common acquaintance or goal. Common ground builds confidence and trust between parties. Here are some questions you can weave into conversation when you’ve talked enough about business or when the topic of business isn’t appropriate for the situation at hand.

27. Who has influenced you most professionally?
28. Who has influenced you most personally?
29. If you had a motto, what would it be?
30. What is success to you?
31. Who do you most admire?
32. What is your best experience?
33. What is your most formative experience?
34. What is your greatest achievement?
35. What is your favourite book? Movie? Destination?
36. What is your exercise regimen?
37. Bob, what do you do for fun/recreation? How do you like to enjoy your spare time? What do you like to do most in your spare time? Outside work, do you have any special interests? Outside work, what would be the greatest personal challenge you’d like to achieve?
38. Where did you grow up Sally? What was life like for you growing up in (wherever)?
39. Where did you go to school? What’s your educational background?
40. What’s your idea of a perfect day?
41. How do you know (the person who introduced you)?
42. Do you follow any sports?
43. What’s your favourite hotel/airline/song/piece of music?
44. What are your favourite places for lunch and dinner? What’s your favourite food?

Successful networking is about sincerity. If you don’t care about the answer, don’t ask the question.

45. How do you stay up to date with ideas and trends?
46. Your greatest professional and personal breakthrough?
47. What do you like to eat and drink?
48. What are your plans for Easter/Christmas/the weekend?
49. Where do you like to go for a holiday?

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50. What's your view/opinion/philosophy on (whatever)?
51. Where are you from originally? What brought you to Australia.... to Perth?
53. What would enable you one day to look back and feel satisfied about your career/business?
54. What do you like about coming to these lunches/functions? What do you like to accomplish when you attend these lunches/functions?
55. Besides your family, what do you miss/enjoy most when you're away from home on business?
56. Sam, so tell me about you.

As soon as the other party mentions a particular issue, grab it and expand on it. Ask follow-up questions to invite him/her to continue or elaborate. It helps to call a person by name and match their delivery, style voice, emotion and body language as you talk.

Workshop: What additional questions relating to the use of your products/services could you weave into your networking conversations?

Effective networking skills do **not** come naturally, but they're easily learned. To find out about my networking and working the room courses, call me, Ron Gibson, on **0413 420 538** or visit my website at www.gonetworking.com.au