

Network for Xmas

Making connections is the name of the game at holiday get-together

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With the holiday season rapidly approaching, business people should be dusting off their networking skills to prepare for the onslaught of social events, where the pressure to interact with new people is often intimidating.

Indeed, effective networking is important for professionals in a range of industries, whether to find new clients, learn more about a certain field or make a career change. The art of schmoozing over a glass of pinot noir and plate of canapé, however, doesn't come naturally to everyone.

"Some people find it easy to walk into a room and ooze charm and charisma, and other people might have to work at it," says Claire Dickson of HR Solutions.

The good news is that networking isn't the exclusive domain of the gifted. Following a few basic rules can make anyone a better networker. To bridge the gap between the naturals and the novices, *The Prague Post* recently spoke with a businessman and two business coaches about the dos and don'ts of networking.

Do:

Be a good listener. Stand out by asking people questions about themselves and their business before talking about yourself. This loosens people up and makes it easier to find common ground, Dickson says.

Come prepared with a few opening lines to break the ice. Commenting on the event is often enough to get the conversation started. Also have a couple exit lines to end conversations politely. Excuse yourself by saying you need to check in with the office or someone else at the function.

Pay attention to your body language. Letting your eyes wander around the room during a conversation is a clear sign that you're bored.

Be aware of cultural nuances. Prague is a "small incubator of culture" where you're likely to meet people from a range of countries on any given night, says business coach Karin Genton-L'Epée. Interrupting conversations may be acceptable in south European countries, but it's thought rude in Central Europe.

Present an easy-going manner. Approach new people with a firm handshake, confident smile and direct eye contact. The best networkers are the people you can't tell are networking, says Mark Anderson, owner of Western Touch and executive director of the Expat Business Association.

Don't:

Trap people. Be considerate of people's time and realize there's someone else they might want or need to speak with, Anderson says.

Approach events as a card-gathering mission. Networking is about developing lasting relationships, Dickson says. Plan to make between two to five new contacts per event.

Talk on and on about yourself. Remember that listening is one of the most important networking skills.

Forget to follow up. Send a new contact an e-mail or handwritten note within a week to arrange a private meeting.