



Work the Roomand Enjoy It!

Another “business therapy “ update with Doug Hall

I have some guilt. For many years, I expected the professionals at my environmental firm to be magicians. I expected them to turn a one-day conference on something-or-other into new work for the firm!.... Immediately. The exact words may have been – “Sure, we’ll cover your expenses BUT you need to bring back at least three hot leads”.

I preferred pressure rather than education. I chose goals without giving tools.

Now I suggest tools. Now I say – ‘Relax, meet some new people, and enjoy yourself’.
(Look what five years of marital therapy did for me.)

The purposes of professional events are to provide helpful information, learn something new, and meet new people. **NOT TO SELL WORK!!** Owners and operators are tired of being pestered with sales pitches. The best approach to them is to provide something of value. Something that will make them remember you after the event is over.

Focus on introductions and relationships – not selling. Use these opportunities for one-on-one face time. Get to know each other through small talk to see if you enjoy conversing with each other. These conversations are the first step in trust building. Listen closely for shared interests and values.

There are a number of ways to prepare for and participate in an event in order to get the most out of it.

- Find out before hand who will be attending. Get a copy of the attendee registration list. Who do you want to meet? Pick several to talk to. Do some research on their businesses before the event.

- Practice your self introduction – make it short, memorable and repeatable. Answer the question – “What do you do”. Memorize it.
- Be up to date with current events and industry issues. These are good small talk topics. Have a few opening lines that are open ended and easy to answer.
- Choose to be a host rather than a guest. Get there early. Offer to help the organizers. Be a greeter. Help with nametags. Spend time with the speaker.
- Realize that at least 95% of the people in the room are at least a little uncomfortable.
- Look for lone rangers. If someone is standing by themselves, go up to them and introduce yourself. You may make a friend for life.
- Repeat the name of a person when you meet them. Somehow this makes it easier to remember their names later on.
- Never sit at an empty table.
- You should anticipate that you will spend no longer than 10 or 15 minutes with any one individual during networking periods. You should be prepared to move on. I call these graceful exits. “Excuse me, I see someone I need to say hello to”; “Will you excuse me, I need to make a phone call- get a drink- go to the restroom” . Or – “Well I don’t want to take up all your time. I’m sure you have other people you want to talk to and so do I. I’d like to continue our conversation later. Let’s catch up next week. Here is my card.”

Take the pressure off your next social or community or professional event. Enjoy yourself and enjoy meeting new people.

(Industry Council on the Environment (ICE) newsletter article submitted June, 2007)