

# Turning networking anxiety into networking opportunities

By Mindy Ferrentino Wolfle

So, you'd rather have root canal than network? I understand completely, and I'm an outgoing person who's been networking and speaking on the topic for more years than I care to remember. But networking needn't be viewed as drudgery, something that you engage in halfheartedly. As a matter of fact, networking is not only essential to creating professional success, but it can be a path to developing lasting friendships, devoting time to charitable endeavors, and building up solid relationships here on Long Island. Whether you're a shrinking violet or the life of the party, networking can be challenging, even intimidating.



Take a look at the *Long Island Business News* Biz/Events calendar, for example, and you'll see that you can easily network morning, noon and night. Golf outings, expos, seminars, workshops, breakfast meetings, luncheons, civic organizations, walkathons, cocktail receptions, galas, dinner meetings, fundraisers...you get the picture. One thing to remember about networking – and this goes for seasoned networkers and those new to the notion – networking is about relationship building. It's not about giving out and collecting the greatest number of business cards.

My best advice for overcoming networking anxiety is what I call gravitating towards other “onezies” in the room. Picture yourself walking into *any* event where networking is on the agenda – which means *every* event. You're alone, feeling invisible, or worse, feeling like you stick out like a sore thumb. Rather than retreating to the bar, the restroom or a table in the back of the room, make this experience worth the time and expense you've invested in it. It's as uncomplicated as walking over to another “onezie,” introducing yourself, and asking an open-ended question of the other “onezie.” The conversation will go something like this:

Me: Hi, I'm Mindy Ferrentino Wolfle. I'm the president of Neptune Marketing. And you are?

You: I'm Hugo Smith and I'm with the Association for the Prevention of Cruelty to Marketers.

Me: Wow, what a great name for an organization. Tell me about your work.

You: Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

So you see, by simply approaching one other person, you've overcome the essence of networking anxiety – feeling like you don't belong. You can further break down the wall of networking anxiety by being an “introduction facilitator.” I know, I've just told you that you only have to speak to one person. But that's not why you decided to get out there and network, is it? Try this “introduction facilitator” script on for size:

Me: Hi (to lonely woman standing nearby). Hugo and I have just been talking about his work at the Association for the Prevention of Cruelty to Marketers. What brings you here tonight?

Lonely woman: I'm so relieved that you approached me. I'm new to Long Island and don't know a soul here.

Hugo: I'm Hugo Smith and this is Mindy Ferrentino Wolfle. She's a big networker, or so she tells me (hearty laughter). And you are?

So now instead of three onezies, we have a legitimate group of people, successfully networking. The key is this: **effective networkers don't wait for opportunities to come to them.** Remember that you can achieve networking success one person at a time, one event at a time. Pretty soon, you'll be figuring out how to fit all those networking opportunities into your schedule.

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