

Coach's Corner

Introvert's Guide to Going F2F and Surviving

by Mary Ellen Bates, Bates Information Services



Like many independent info pros, I am an introvert. The mere thought of a roomful of people exhausts me; my idea of a perfect evening includes no more than a quiet room, my dogs nearby and a good book. And yet... I have learned to look forward to professional conferences, particularly AIIP's annual conference. (And yes, the AIIP 2018 Annual Conference in Minneapolis, MN is coming soon—register now at aiip.org/conference.)

Sure, most of my marketing is still done from the comfort of my home, where the office dress code is jeans and a t-shirt. I am giving webinars, writing columns, blogging and participating in social media, and sending email—all great ways to build my brand and cultivate my referral network from behind my keyboard.

I still get exhausted when I am surrounded by people all day, but I have also found that getting out and spending time face to face has benefits that I can't get from non-meet-space activities and interactions. And I'm not talking about local business referral networks; while those may be effective for some infopreneurs, we introverts are not the sort of person likely to have a large network of acquaintances who frequently need referrals from us. Rather, I mean meetings of professionals with whom we have something in common and where we can learn something new. This may be a local chapter meeting of an association your prospects

belong to, a Meetup on a topic you're interested in, or a multi-day professional conference.

Following are my tips for how we introverts can get the most from our time out there in rooms full of people and, maybe, even enjoy ourselves.

Pause. Plan to get to your meeting destination five or ten minutes early. Find a quiet spot and write down any pending thoughts or concerns, to clear your mind of distractions. Remind yourself of what you want to accomplish during this meeting—to learn more about your market's biggest concerns, to meet three people you can continue a conversation with later, to get new ideas on a topic you care about, and so on. Set a clear intention that, during conversations, you will talk 25 percent of the time and listen 75 percent, and that you will learn at least one new thing from the event.

Listen. Introduce yourself to the people sitting on either side of you; find out what interested them in attending the event, what they enjoy the most about their job, or how they got into their line of work. Hearing how your colleagues describe their challenges or interests helps you understand how they see the world, and successful infopreneurship depends on staying open to new perspectives.

Cultivate serendipity. One of my most successful conference experiences, in terms of connections made and new client



relationships started, was spent doing, well, nothing. I found a hallway or lobby where there were plenty of people walking by, and I just sat on a bench and casually made eye contact with people walking by. A surprising number of people would stop and chat for a minute, and some of my most interesting new ideas and connections came from these random conversations.

Set measurable goals. Promise yourself you will talk with at least, say, six people and get their business cards. Yes, it's fine to hand out your card to them, but it is much more important to gather your contacts' cards so you can follow up after the meeting with a personal note. If you are attending an event that required a big investment of time or money, plan ahead for other ways to maximize your investment. Set up meetings with speakers or clients, talk with exhibitors to get their impression of the market and write a blog post about what you heard, and join in dinner dine-arounds.

Just do it. Even if you don't feel like it, just show up. Those evenings when it is cold and raining and you would rather stay home are the best times to go out to a meeting. The people who do show up are motivated, which means they are more likely to be interested in what you do. And you can always talk about the weather!

Find your mantra. When I am in the third day of a conference and wondering why I'm doing this, I repeat my mantra: "Everyone has to market themselves; I only have to do this a few times a year." When I am walking into a reception and feeling daunted, I remind myself that all I have to do is ask someone a question and then listen. Figure out what helps you calm the butterflies in your stomach and the voices in your head telling you to flee. Repeat as needed.

As challenging as face-to-face events can be, consider them the infrequent price we introverts pay for working independently, and a great way to glean new insights from unexpected sources.



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