


It's a Dirty Job...

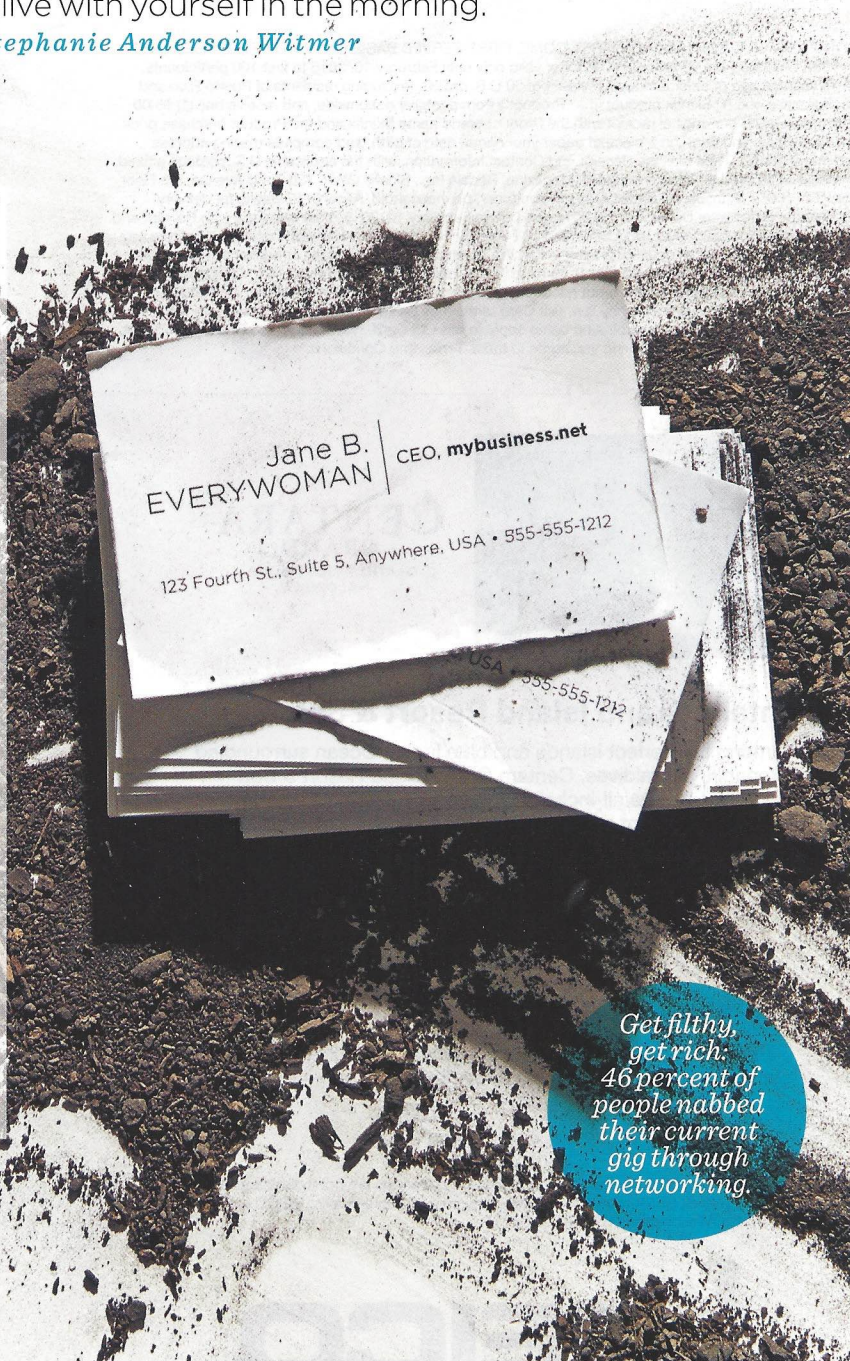
...but you've gotta do it if you want to get ahead. Yes, we're talking networking. Everything you need to know to work a room (and your contacts) like a boss—and still be able to live with yourself in the morning.

By *Stephanie Anderson Witmer*



You want to kill it in your career, but you'd rather pull overtime until your eyes cross than hit up another business mixer. We get it. And so do a lot of other people. A recent study found that networking makes some of us feel dirty—literally physically unclean. Thing is, if you're job hunting or itching for a promotion, mingling is a must. In fact, one survey found that around 80 percent of positions aren't even posted.

Well, here's some reassuring intel: Women tend to be better than men at creating the authentic bonds that are key to successful networking, says Devora Zack, author of *Networking for People Who Hate Networking*. To grease your social wheels even further, we've zeroed in on the top five reasons networking can feel gross and asked pros how to overcome the squeamishness so you can start connecting.



Get filthy, get rich: 46 percent of people nabbed their current gig through networking.

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• *Work events can leave you feeling sour.*

person next to you an easily answered Q, like “So which company are you with?” says Amanda Steinberg, founder of the financial site DailyWorth. Then break down your goals into more bite-size pieces: Circulate for 20 minutes instead of an hour; introduce yourself to three people, not 15. Take solo breaks in a quiet spot when you need a second to recharge.

Or head online, where you have more control. Send a friendly catch-up e-mail to a former coworker who has a job at your dream workplace, for instance. Keep it brief and don’t ask for anything right off the bat, especially if she just landed a new position. Instead, share an interesting link (either about your field or a topic you’ve chatted about before), or congratulate her on a recent success. Two to three months later, after you’ve had an exchange or two, it’s fine to ask her to pass on your résumé or make an introduction. Once she’s done that, schedule a real-time rendezvous. “Online networking is great for making contact, but it can’t replace face-to-face interaction,” says Powers.

THE WHOLE THING FEELS SO FORCED.

Yes, the traditional concept *is* artificial. Much like speed dating, networking events that bill themselves as such just don’t reflect how we naturally interact best—in a low-pressure situation, with peeps we’re already somewhat acquainted with. That’s why you might push yourself to find common ground in ways that feel inauthentic (falling into jargon-speak, laughing at bad jokes) and not get very far for your efforts.

GET OVER IT!

“You don’t need to go to a networking event to network,” says Jenny Powers, founder of Running With Heels, a women’s-only networking group in New York City. To deepen your connections organically, invite a few work buds to grab drinks, and ask each to bring an industry plus-one. You’ll strengthen your bond with your colleagues (which translates into more on-the-job support) while meeting new people, says Derek Coburn, author of *Networking Is Not Working*. Other nonwork opportunities to widen your social circle (and hopefully get future leads): Join a book club, talk to

parents at your kids’ schools, or scan Meetup.com for events that you’d go to even without the promise of a career opp.

JUST THE IDEA OF PLASTERING ON A BIG GRIN DRAINS YOU.

Having to talk to strangers + a crowded hotel ballroom full of ‘em = a shy person’s fresh hell.

GET OVER IT!

Work with—not against—your personality, says Zack. Say you’re headed to an event. Arrive early, before everyone pairs up, and make a beeline for the buffet or bar. Ask the

YOU GET TONGUE-TIED TALKING TO BIGWIGS.

Chatting up senior types who may offer you a job one day is smart, but nerves can make you clam up (or worse, word-vomit).

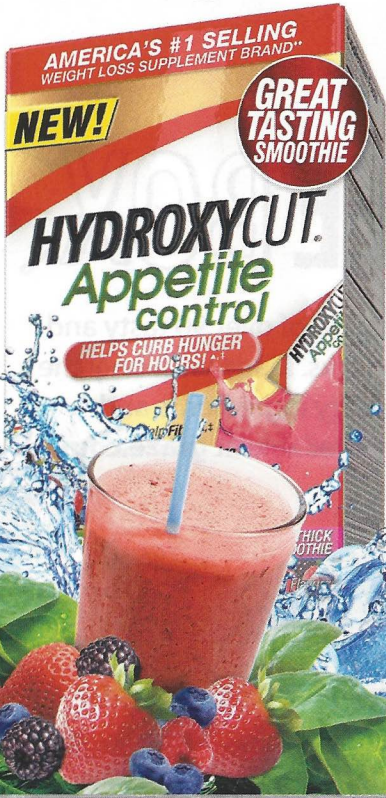
GET OVER IT!

Do your homework. If you are attending an event and know a VIP you want to impress will be there, prep a 20- to 30-second intro that includes your name, what you do, and what you enjoy about it. This will allow you to talk confidently without rambling—or going mute. Then shift the focus to her. “Have something specific to say about

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¹Scientific research suggests people taking kelp fiber (sodium alginate) reduced their appetite for hours after a meal.

²Average weight loss with another key ingredient (green coffee) was 10.95 lbs. in a 60-day study with a low-calorie diet, and 3.7 lbs. in a separate 8-week study with a calorie-reduced diet and moderate exercise.

Know It All

her work,” says Zack. Don’t ask to “pick her brain” (everyone does that); mention her column in the company newsletter, for example. Google-stalk in advance if you need to gather info. Keep the convo under five minutes, then gracefully make an exit. (“This was a pleasure—I’m sure you have a million other people to chat with.”)

Rarely in a room with senior brass? E-mail a big cheese and tell her why you’d like to talk (example: You have an idea to pitch). Say you’ll meet wherever is most convenient for her, and you only need 15 minutes. Prepare talking points to keep yourself on target.

IT’S AWKWARD TALKING ABOUT HOW FAB YOU ARE.

Most of us were trained early on not to boast. That’s selfish, right?

GET OVER IT!

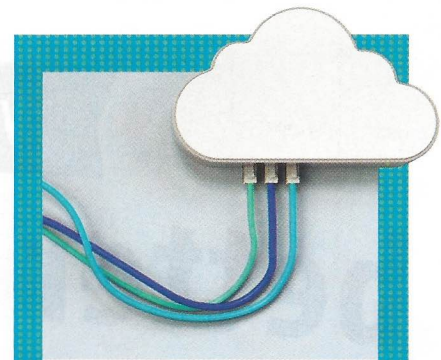
Please. Networking requires some horn tooting. To play up your wins without coming across like a braggy jerk, share a brief anecdote that shows what you can do for the person you’re talking to, not the other way around, says Lynne Waymon, CEO of Contacts Count, a business networking-training company in Washington, D.C. Instead of “I’m a senior vice muckety-muck of outreach” (*bo-ring*), you might say, “I help people get the word out when they start a new business. One of my clients just got mentioned on the front page of the *Washington Post*. I’m so thrilled for her!” Powers says, “People can typically tell genuine enthusiasm from blatant self-promotion.”

IT FEELS LIKE A WASTE OF TIME.

Your hands are covered in paper cuts from passing out business cards, you’ve gone to so many drinks powwows that the bartender knows your fave wine, and your wrists are sore from all those e-mails you’ve been sending. What you’ve gotten in return? Bupkis.

GET OVER IT!

Odds are, you’re overdoing it—too many events, too many contacts—which can prevent you from following up in a meaningful way, says Zack. The next time you meet someone you want



The Social Networks

More than a third of all employers peruse social sites during the hiring process. When they stumble upon your feeds, make sure they like what they see.



LINKEDIN

Post a profesh-looking photo and clearly state your current role. Highlight skills that pertain to your career goals.



TWITTER

Follow leaders in your field and retweet their content (keep it to once a day or less, otherwise it can come off as creepy).



FACEBOOK

Set your privacy settings to “Friend” so potential employers can’t be swayed by personal opinions they don’t share.

to keep tabs on, connect with him on LinkedIn, and send a brief e-mail within two days. (The exception: Don’t do it on Monday, the day people tend to be swamped. Or Friday afternoon, when they’re trying to get out the door.) Remind him of your conversation, and if you promised to do something (like e-introduce him to a colleague), do so. No response? Wait two weeks and then send a second e-mail. If you hear crickets after that, cut your losses and move on.

Also: Check your balance. If your efforts are a bit lopsided (too much online networking and not enough face time), lean the other way. You’ll reach out to fewer people—but the interactions will likely be more fruitful. ■

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