

# Networking queens

A FULL BUSINESS CARD HOLDER DOESN'T MEAN YOU'RE A GOOD NETWORKER.

Julia Palmer says Australians are fairly ordinary when it comes to networking.

Ms Palmer is the owner of B Consulted, a company that trains corporate executives in the art of networking effectively, and is also the author of a new book on the subject, *Buzz*. She is also a seasoned public speaker and international traveller.

By the time Ms Palmer was 25, she was a general manager for an international events company based in Singapore. The role followed other posts in London and Sweden. She still travels the world attending networking events and training

people, and says Sydneysiders in particular are clueless when it comes to networking.

"Part of the problem is that networking is a dirty word here. People see it as connected to selling and that is not it at all," Ms Palmer explains.

True networking is building relationships with people with common or complementary interests to yours, with a view that one day, down the road, you might be able to assist one another. However, at the point of contact, that is all just background noise.

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"It is too late to build a relationship when you need it most," Ms Palmer says.

She is also horrified by some of the network training programs here that encourage people to see a business function as a challenge to collect as many business cards as possible, even if they more often than not get buried in a drawer.

"Wrong," Ms Palmer says. The correct process is to meet people and spend a little time chatting to figure out if there is any reason to stay in touch.

### SOME OTHER TIPS TO HELP YOU BECOME A SMOOTH OPERATOR:

- **Do a little research on the company staging the function** you are attending so you can figure out what sort of guests will be there and if you should actually attend at all. We are all time poor and work-related functions



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should not be seen as a good excuse to eat and drink.

- If you are attending a function with work colleagues, **split up and meet some new people.**
- **Look for groups of three or more to break into.** A pair of people in deep conversation is probably not the place to start.

- Be up-front and ask, "may I join you?" Smile and introduce yourself and then take a listening role.
- When walking up to someone on their own, **introduce yourself and then make some small talk about the event itself,** the venue or even the weather. Just don't let your first question be "What do you do?".

- **When your employer is hosting** a function, no matter what your role, make a point of walking up to people on their own to make them feel comfortable.
- **If you are asked for your business card** by all means offer it but otherwise wait until you establish whether you would like to stay in touch with the person you have just met. Same applies when asking for business cards. But do make sure you have plenty on hand.
- Having a drink is fine but **don't over do it.** Ms Palmer says her research shows people feel more comfortable approaching someone with a drink in their hand.

For more tips, check out *Buzz* or the website [www.bconsulted.com.au](http://www.bconsulted.com.au).

*Kate Southam is the editor of [careerone.com.au](http://careerone.com.au)*