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We have been doing networking surveys with our Positive Networking® workshop participants for the past seven years (thousands of responses!) and we've noticed three common themes when it comes to networking challenges:

1. Most people have anxiety around networking and/or fear of rejection.
2. Conversation is difficult—both small talk and how to create more engaged conversations.
3. Finding the time is hard.

As part of reaching our 500th Positive Networking® Tip milestone we decided to ask you, our weekly tips readers, to complete a 2-Minute Survey on Networking to see if your challenges would be similar. We've got good news for you. You are perfectly normal. You've got the same challenges as our other survey respondents, and even a few new ones!

While we can't address all of your challenges here (we'll save some for our weekly tips), we have taken your top 100 as told to us in your own words and provided answers. Never before have we specifically answered challenges put to us by our tips readers, so this e-guide is just for you.

What if you don't have any of these networking challenges? There's still value in reading this information (and sharing it). There will be people on your team, colleagues, friends and family who could use these answers.

In some cases we've added these kinds of answers:

**Easiest:** We've given you quick, easy solutions.

**Awesome:** We've given you suggestions on how to be a truly awesome networker or connector.

**NEW:** You get to rate this free e-guide on the last page. We strive to not waste your time, but provide useful information, and we'd love your feedback.

— Gayle, Judy and Darcy
Shepa Learning Company
YOUR CHALLENGE #1

“I am extremely shy and introverted.”
“Being an introvert I am most comfortable in small groups or one-on-one.”

OUR ANSWER

If you are an introvert, or consider yourself shy, we know that the answers we will be giving you in this e-guide may be more difficult for you to put into practice. As best-selling author Susan Cain says in *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, a networking situation for an introvert is ‘not their happy place.’ While networking events may not be your happy place, it is possible to adjust your perspective before you attend a networking event, have new skills while actually circulating with others at the event, and better understand your feelings when it’s over. As an introvert, approach networking with this attitude:

1. **It’s how you roll:** Before networking, remind yourself that being an introvert is not a disease. It’s simply a preference in the way you engage with others. Recognize that situations where you need to connect with groups will push you outside your comfort zone, and that is OK. This may require a little self-talk, “Something great is going to come out of this event.” Go to the event feeling confident about being a giver, not a taker (see our “7 Secrets of Positive Networking®” e-guide link on page 28).

2. **You aren’t the only one who feels this way:** Research show that 30% of people are introverts, and 50% of the population has some form of anxiety around networking. Use this self-talk, “There are others in the room who feel the same way, maybe I can make them feel more comfortable.”

3. **You need a little down time:** Introverts feel drained after networking in a large crowd of people. Give yourself permission to relax after an event.

One of us was very introverted. **Find out who it was.**

*If you like this advice, Tweet it.*
**DO YOU FEAR REJECTION?**

Generally speaking, introverts have a preference for being in quiet, minimally stimulating environments, while extroverts love the energy of a room full of people ("Let me at 'em!"). Of course, there's a spectrum. There's some confusion around introversion and shyness. Typically, shy people have fear or anxiety around social interactions. It's often stated that shy people fear rejection, but who doesn't?

The three most important points we want to get across to people who feel they are introverts and/or shy are:

1. It does require you stepping out of your comfort zone, but that's a good thing. See our weekly tip on that topic.
2. You are not the only one. Walk into any situation and a third to a half of the people in that room feel the same way.
3. Everyone gets rejected, even the pros. On the next page we share one of the most shocking rejection stories and how Darcy dealt with it.

You can feel a lot better about any networking situation if you know the rules and the true-and-true techniques. You'll find all of this information in our book, *Work The Pond!*, which has been called the connector's handbook.

You can get it as an e-book, trade paperback or audio book.

**NETWORK RULE NUMBER 7**

As told by Darcy Rezac:

My own worst networking experience was a doozer. When just starting my job at The Board of Trade, I was invited to an event hosted by the stock exchange. I approached a high profile, somewhat flamboyant investment banker I had not yet met. I extended my hand and said, "Hello, I am Darcy Rezac. I am with The Board of Trade." He replied, "Good for you," turned and walked away. I was taken aback; it took me some time to come to grips with that put-down, until I learned Network Rule No. 7.

In their book, *The Art of Possibility*, Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander have a chapter on their Rule No. 6. In a nutshell, it states: "Don't take yourself so damn seriously." In other words, lighten up. It is great advice. It was the inspiration for my Network Rule No. 7. And before you ask—no, there are no other rules.

When you encounter a networking setback, as all good networkers surely will, deal with it this way: Get over it and move on. This is Network Rule No. 7, and here's what I mean.

I came to understand that this investment banker had clearly decided that there was nothing I could ever do for him. That was his problem, not mine. Here was a person who had decided to move down the frog chain. Again, his decision, not mine.

Toads happen. You will have the misfortune of meeting them; my advice is to hop over them and move on.

-Excerpt from *Work The Pond!*
YOUR CHALLENGE #2

“Getting up the nerve to speak to strangers.”
“Gather enough courage to make the first move.”

OUR ANSWER

This is a mind over matter issue because there’s an infinitesimally small chance that anything really awful is going to happen. You probably won’t be struck by lightning. The floor won’t open up and suck you into Middle Earth. Starting a conversation with a stranger is never a breeze, but what’s the option? Standing alone is even more awkward.

When you make the first move, be prepared that it could go sideways. Sometimes people aren’t pleased that you’ve approached them even when they are standing alone! If they aren’t welcoming, if they put up their wall understand what’s happening is at a neural level. Yes, at a neural level.

Daniel Goleman, author of Social Intelligence, explains it this way: “The brain’s areas for movement and emotion are peppered with mirror neurons, a newly discovered class of brain cells that act like neural Wi-Fi. These neurons specialize in tuning into the person we are with and creating in our brain a replica of the other’s emotions, actions, and intentions tuning us to their wavelength. When a person is not welcoming you probably react like most people: Your smile evaporates and you start thinking, ‘I wonder why they don’t like me?’

Emotions are contagious and if you mirror the other person’s behavior you’ve caught their negative virus. Instead, act confident, continue to smile, stay relaxed and maintain the conversation in a positive manner. Perhaps, change the topic of conversation. Your goal is to leave that person with a positive impression. By acting confident you will feel better, and you’ll feel you are in control of the situation.

If you want to learn more about social intelligence and mirror neurons pick up Daniel Goleman’s book, Social Intelligence.

Easier: Go with a tag teammate because it makes meeting strangers so much easier.

If you like this advice, Tweet it.
YOUR CHALLENGE #3

“It's a challenge to break in and introduce yourself where there are cliques.”

OUR ANSWER

This is where confidence is a huge asset and confidence comes from a getting out there and practicing the face-to-face skills of networking. There is no substitute. Walk up to a friendly, open group (not one where you have to use a jack-hammer to break into the circle). Find an opening and try to make eye contact with someone. Look confident (even if you don’t feel that way). When there is a break in the conversation, introduce yourself.

Yes, you can still be rejected (sorry, people still act like nerds in their cliques) but you won’t take it personally. You’ve had too much success before.

Easier: if you go with a tag teammate you can practice breaking into groups with your back up. Say to your tag teammate, “Wait here while I go try and break into that group. If it doesn’t work, come rescue me.” You’ll discover that knowing you’ve got an escape hatch will give you more confidence, and you won’t stand on the fringes. You’ll find your moment and introduce yourself.

Awesome: When someone is trying to join your group be the kind of Positive Networker that:

- Acknowledges that person immediately with a smile.
- Brings that person into the group when you find a break in the conversation, “Please join our conversation. Let me introduce you to everyone.”

If you like this advice, Tweet it.
YOUR CHALLENGE #4

“I am not quick with small talk.”
“Struggle with small talk, if person I'm talking to is not ‘chatty’.”

OUR ANSWER

We can relate! We’ve all started conversations, and then in the back of our mind have thought, “That was pretty lame. Seriously, I’m talking about the weather?”

Our first piece of advice is simple, whatever anyone has told you about some cool question you can ask to magically start a conversation with a stranger—well, sorry, it doesn’t exist.

Understand that it feels awkward, but you’ve got to start somewhere. We suggest you simply start asking questions (not weird ones, instead logical ones, even weather and sports). The goal is to get people talking about themselves, what they do, their passions or interests. Once you achieve this, the conversation will begin to flow. Of course, people need to feel you are genuinely interested in them, and our Awesomeness advice will tell you how.

Awesomeness: If you enter every conversation with this attitude—everyone has a story—amazing things will happen. Our goal, when we start a conversation with a stranger, is to find that story. Incredible things have happened as a result of this belief.

Making that connection!

If you like this answer on small talk, Tweet it.
YOUR CHALLENGE #5

“Conversational skills - I can generally carry/direct a conversation well but there are some people I am entirely awkward with and I cannot clearly identify why.”

OUR ANSWER

We like this question because it’s something we have also experienced. Sometimes there’s a you-can’t-put-your-finger-on-it-kind-of-awkwardness, and it is a different feeling than talking to someone who is shy, or who gives one-word answers to your questions.

When this non-harmonic convergence happens you need to go up to 12,000 feet — our way of saying “move away from the emotion and analyze it.” Perhaps this person doesn’t want to talk to you because:

- You can’t do anything for them (they don’t understand Positive Networking®).
- They think they are too high up the food chain for mere mortals.
- You are too high up the food chain and why would you talk to me?
- Maybe it’s nothing; you are just overthinking their reaction.

Our advice is to use your social intelligence skills (see Challenge #2). Remember, not all relationships will work. Don’t invest too much energy in the outcome. Move on, gracefully. (It will feel better to you if you do the disengagement.)

If you like this advice, Tweet it.
YOUR CHALLENGE #6

“Exiting conversations gracefully.”

“Sometimes the ‘exiting’ of a conversation feels awkward. Suggestions on how to do this smoothly would be helpful.”

OUR ANSWER

Without fail, this is a question that is asked during our seminars and workshops, and we tell people that exiting a conversation is one of the harder things to do when circulating in the pond.

We explain, “It requires a little bit of tough love.”

Find a moment in the conversation when you can change the subject. Let the other person know that you are going to move on. It’s important to wrap up the conversation nicely. Natalie, I’m so glad I’ve learned more about your company. You’ve done some impressive things. You’ve really got a handle on social media. Thanks for your insight. It was great talking to you. Shaking hands is a nice way of signing off.

Of course, none of this exit dialogue will work if you haven’t been interested in Natalie, or if you’ve been scanning the room, planning your escape, while talking to her.

Easier: Rather than breaking off and leaving Natalie standing alone, suggest this, “Let's go meet some other people.”

Awesomeness: If you see Natalie later in the event, and you think you’d like to introduce her to someone you know, be the Connector.

If you like this advice on disengaging, Tweet it.
YOUR CHALLENGE #7

“Scheduling to attend an event due to time, and sometimes cost.”

“Finding the time when everything else seems to be a higher priority, especially at work.”

OUR ANSWER

You’ve actually answered part of this Time Challenge question — schedule it! Networking falls to the bottom of the priority pile as work keeps piling on. It may be your best intention to do more networking, but unless you put it in your calendar it won’t happen.

You can also improve your chances of not cancelling if you invite someone to accompany you. That doesn’t mean you have to pay for them, but making that commitment to go to the event with someone will keep you from bailing.

The irony of this challenge is that investing time in building a network actually saves you time in the long run. That’s because a network gives you access to resources, ideas, and solutions that you can tap into to help you to do your job more efficiently.

Regarding your challenge of cost, it’s amazing what people will spend on their business, yet they won’t spend $50 for a chamber event, or $250 to go to their local children’s hospital fund-raising gala. Read more on these important Marquee Events. But, there are also many free events, low-cost events available where you can network. It does require doing some work on Google to find these events, but they are there if you look.

Investing in networking (time and money) is a key business development tactic: “People do business with those they know, trust and like. People recommend people they know, trust and like.” You’ve got to become known. Be an ambassador for your brand!

Awesomeness: When doing your business planning, budget for networking events. And, to get the maximum impact from your networking efforts, don’t just buy a ticket or pay the membership fee. Get the most of the investment by showing up and getting involved. Volunteer your time.
YOUR CHALLENGE #8

“Finding appropriate events to attend, things where I will likely meet people with whom I have something in common.”

“Finding groups that I ‘fit’ with.”

OUR ANSWER

With all of us being so time challenged, this is an important issue to address. Here are some questions worth asking yourself:

- What do I need most? Do I need a support network* or, do I need a network that will open me up to new opportunities?
- What’s the most dynamic organization in my community?
- Where can I meet a diverse group of people? (A network of depth and breadth is important.)
- Ask someone you know who has a great network for advice (perhaps they invite you to an event).
- Who should be in my network but isn’t, and where can I go to meet them?
- Where can I add value, and in the process raise my profile?

Finding groups where you have a fit takes some time. Being a newbie may color your judgement so take the time to see if there is a fit. Keep going back— one event does not a network make.

- Women’s networks, mentoring for students networks, venture capital/angel investor networks, industry affiliations are examples of support networks. They are also great places to build your network.

*Women’s networks, mentoring for students networks, venture capital/angel investor networks, industry affiliations are examples of support networks. They are also great places to build your network.
YOUR CHALLENGE #9

“Follow up. Staying in Touch.”

“Maintaining Relationships.”

OUR ANSWER

Following up takes work and requires discipline and patience. Here are some things to consider when following up:

- When you meet someone, look for an opportunity to share some information at a later date. If you’ve been asking questions and are interested in them, you probably have enough knowledge so you can follow up with some topic you touched on.
- If you meet someone and want to follow up ask permission right then and there: "Would it be OK if I contacted you to discuss this further?"
- One of the easiest ways to follow up, if you don’t have a specific reason, is to ask them to join you on LinkedIn with a personalized invite, "We met at the finance minister’s speech on Friday—those were pretty amazing comments he made!"

Maintaining a relationship can seem onerous—it could be a life-long commitment! Here are some ideas to maintain relationships:

- Go back to the same events or organizations regularly. Face-to-face contact is the easiest way to build rapport and trust.
- Be a connector. Connect people in your network. Think about this all the time.
- Reach out. It could be simply, "How are things going?"
- Send holiday cards. "The season is the reason."
- Use social media to share ideas and information of value.

“If we spend little time interacting in social, business and community activities, our network won’t disappear, but it will depreciate like any aging asset. Network interaction—especially where we add value through our ideas and support—helps maintain the asset.”

—Dr. Daniel Muzyka, CEO, Conference Board of Canada
YOUR CHALLENGE #10

“I don’t think I bring as much to the table as others.”

“Feeling that I have something to contribute to the other person.”

OUR ANSWER

While this may seem like a rather shocking challenge, it’s one that we often see in our anonymous surveys. In past surveys we’ve seen similar quotes (“I don’t bring as much to the table” “I don’t have something to contribute” no matter what the level of experience from both men and women. For us this challenge is different from the first challenge (shy/introverts) because we feel that this is a “perspective” challenge. It’s what Arianna Huffington calls your “obnoxious roommate living in your head.” Tune out that annoying (and negative) roommate and go into any networking situation with these mantras:

- I will learn something new.
- I will meet interesting people (“Everyone has a story.”)
- I have something to offer.
- I am not selling myself; I’m here to discover how I can help others.
- I know there are other people who feel the same way, so I will make an effort to be more welcoming and more empathic when meeting people.
About Us

Darcy Rezac, Gayle Hallgren-Rezac and Judy Thomson are speakers and co-authors of *Work The Pond! Use the Power of Positive Networking to Leap Forward in Work and Life* (Prentice Hall).

**Darcy** is The Storyteller, an inspiring keynote speaker on Positive Networking® and The Connected Mindset™. He is managing director emeritus of The Vancouver Board of Trade, an internationally recognized business association, and he has held executive positions with the Canadian federal government, Alcan and General Motors.

**Gayle and Judy** are The Dynamic Duo, whose conference opener keynote LeapStart!™ changes the dynamic of any conference or national meeting. Gayle and Judy are also known for their enjoyable roll-up your sleeves interactive workshops in the areas of Positive Networking®, Positive Communication™ and their program for women (and a few brave men) entitled The Engaged Woman Leader™. Gayle is an entrepreneur (founder, Cookies by George) and a recipient of the YWCA Woman of Distinction award. Judy is a chartered accountant and corporate director. She was part of the startup team of the world famous Rocky Mountaineer Railtours and held executive positions in human resources and administration with global companies in Canada and Asia.

Did you find this e-guide “Top Networking Challenges Solved!” useful?

Rate it on scale of 1 to 5 (5 being really useful).

Add a comment if you’d like.

Open [this link](http://shepalearning.com/free-weekly-tip/) to complete the one-question survey!

**Books we mentioned in this e-guide:**

- *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking* by Susan Cain
- *Our book, Work The Pond!*

**Free resources we mentioned:**

- [7 Secrets of Positive Networking® e-guide](http://shepalearning.com/networking-challenges-eguide/)

**Sign up for our free Weekly Positive Networking® Tip+**

http://shepalearning.com/free-weekly-tip/

**Tell your friends & colleagues about “Top Networking Challenge Solved!”**

Send them [this link](http://shepalearning.com/networking-challenges-eguide/) to download the e-guide:

Email us at: info@shepalearning.com