

# The science of connections: Local expert gives tips on how to network

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## **Elizabeth Noll**

Sheila Krejci has many titles: adjunct faculty, trainer, consultant and president of Sheila Krejci Training Associates. She's a devoted networker who never quits, even when her voice does. Despite losing her voice, Krejci agreed to be interviewed by email.

MWP: Do you consider yourself an extrovert, and if so, have you always been?

SK: I've always been an extrovert in social situations, but being around people constantly is not where I re-energize. In fact, I need a great deal of silent, reflective time.

MWP: Are all extroverts good at networking? Are all introverts bad at it?

SK: Extroverts are not automatically the best networkers. On the contrary, introverts who practice the R.I.S.K. of networking, where "I" means being intentional, are quite successful at giving to others and asking for what they need in return.

The rest of the acronym R.I.S.K. is R (take a Risk); I (be Intentional); S (be Specific); K (be Kind).

MWP: How can you tell a longtime networker from someone who's just learning?

SK: I can most often detect when someone is uncomfortable with the situation by their body language. Averting eyes or looking beyond me to see who is next or who they should be talking to is a sure sign that they aren't comfortable in this role of meeting new people. Someone who is an accomplished networker looks you in the eye as if you're the only one in the room at the time.

MWP: What tips can you give a shy person about networking?

SK: Relax! Chances are there are others who are feeling the same way or may be more uncomfortable with their situation.

Attend workshops, meetings of your professional association.

Don't expect too much of yourself. Concentrate on having genuine conversations rather than scripted "elevator speeches."

Ask lots and lots of questions. When asked, be brief with your own responses.

Continue moving to other people—physically or with your eyes. Don't stay in one conversation

too long.

Prepare! Prepare! Prepare! Especially if the idea of networking is really uncomfortable. Think about what you might say if you become tongue-tied.

MWP: What are some things to avoid when trying to network?

SK: Don't sit with your current acquaintances. Find new people to get to know.

Don't pass out or collect hoards of business cards or brochures. These are great only when you make a true connection with someone. (Then be sure to record where/when you met and why you want to follow up.)

Don't linger with one person at an event intended for networking specifically. If you make connections, great! Plan to get together for more conversation later.

MWP: What about people who feel like they're being insincere when they network—what advice do you have for them?

SK: Meet people with the intention that you have something to give to them rather than you need something from them. Ask lots of questions and really get to know people and their needs, so that you can make connections for them with others. Follow up with people when you have something they might need or like: an article, book or new contact information.

Also, take care not to contact people only when you have a new service or product to offer. Make connections in between these opportunities.

Make networking part of your daily routine, rather than a task to be scheduled or an event to attend.

Remember that people love to share their knowledge and experience—ask for their help and let them know how you can help them!

MWP: How does someone practice networking?

SK: Prepare! There are tools that I use with participants such as scripts I've prepared ahead of events or meetings. We prepare by practicing until the words become natural. It's OK to have a brief introduction ready if people ask about you.

Attend events with someone who is comfortable meeting new people. Spend some time together and then be intentional about seeking out newcomers on your own.

Invite people to attend events with you so that you can plan to go together. You can separate and meet again later after the meeting.

Keep a contact management system up to date. Make it a practice to update it at least twice weekly. Purge old information annually as well.

Follow up.

Sheila Krejci's Networking is a Lifetime Skill workshops include practice time.

For more information, contact Sheila K Training, Inc. at 651-402-1274.