

Try to find ways to be helpful to people

Erica Thompson

GET over yourself.

That's the first step to becoming an effective networker says organisational psychologist and author of *Networking Exposed* Lisa Butler.

"Networking is about finding ways to help other people," she says. "It's not about you or about selling your business. You obviously need to be able to talk about your business in an interesting and meaningful way, but real networking is not about pitching — it's about building genuinely helpful relationships."

This may come as a surprise to those of us used to pushy, business card-wielding power networkers.

"Nobody really wants to be out there shoving their cards at people and talking non-stop about their business — and it's not very comfortable to be on the receiving end of that either," she says.

"Networking is much broader than that ... It's just a matter of learning how to converse with people and how to build rapport and how to look for opportunities to help or connect people. That's not necessarily hard to do, it just takes a little bit of thought."

She suggests doing some homework before the event and having a few questions up your sleeve.

"Really effective networkers do their research so well that they know who's going to be there and are even thinking beyond that so

"If I know these six people, who of those six do I think would be worthwhile meeting each other?"

While Ms Butler appreciates not everyone has the time to prepare a fact file on every person they meet, going armed with the right mindset is the important thing.

"We tend to focus our networking effort on people who are our clients or prospective clients," she says. "But you should never underestimate the networking value of the people you meet."

"Networking can simply be talking to other parents at your child's soccer match on the weekend."

Making the right impression also depends on the little details.

"These ladies who have their name tag right down their cleavage — you just think what on earth are you doing?" Ms Butler says. For the record, name tags should sit high on the right hand side.

But even if you're feeling polished and prepared, walking into a room full of strangers can be daunting — especially if they're female. "Groups of women are very difficult to break into," Ms Butler says. "Females tend to stand square on to each other when they're talking and the group is very closed."

"Groups of men, on the other hand, tend to stand side by side and make less eye contact so they notice people (outside the group) and are more open to anybody joining in."



COMMUNICATE ... Lisa Butler with *Networking Exposed*.

Picture: Tim Mar

Five networking myths

● Networking is selling

People who focus on selling themselves are taking a short-term approach and do not understand the true nature of networking.

● You must distribute heaps of business cards

It's not the number of cards you get out there, it's whether people who

get them remember you.

● You're either good at it or you're not

Networking doesn't come naturally for everyone but is a skill that can be learnt.

● Networking is a waste of time

Networking doesn't necessarily reap rewards immediately but don't

give up — it will happen.

● You can network only 'networking' events

You can network anywhere, anytime, as long as you show respect for others.

Networking Exposed
Lisa Butler available at

networkingexpo.com