**An Introvert's Guide to Networking**

by Lisa Petrilli  |   9:15 AM January 25, 2012I learned the critical importance of networking, and discovered my natural aversion to it, early in my career. I was a new college graduate working in the strategic planning division of a $10 billion company, and our business unit had been invited to a retirement party for one of the top executives. The gentleman retiring was someone I'd looked up to during my brief tenure, and I wanted him to know he'd made an impact on me.

While I wanted to attend the party, as an introvert I usually avoided these types of events because they made me uncomfortable. Knowing there would be a lot of senior executives at this party made me even more fearful. In the end, I tamped down my fears and went. When I arrived I found a relatively empty room save for the executive's friends and close colleagues. That night, because of the small turnout, I had the pleasure and advantage of engaging in one-on-one conversations with some of the company's top executives, an experience that would prove crucially important in advancing my career.

That evening I learned the importance of networking and realized I had to figure out how to engage in business events in ways that were comfortable for me. I went on to discover an array of strategies introverts can use, ultimately writing ["The Introvert's Guide to Success in Business and Leadership"](http://www.lisapetrilli.com/the-introverts-guide/). Because I figured out how to embrace networking I found myself in the plum role of leading one of the highest visibility company teams as a new marketing manager at the age of 26, and representing the company at a United Nations conference in Geneva. I went on to run a $750 million business and negotiate pharmaceutical contracts with top global companies, all in a way that worked effectively with my introverted preferences.

Here's what worked for me:

**I learned to appreciate my introversion rather than repudiate it.**

I have met so many introverts in business who talk about introversion as if it's a malady that one must get over in order to be successful. This is wrong. Introversion is simply a preference for the inner world of ideas because this is where we get our energy. By understanding and accepting this preference, introverts can optimize time spent with their ideas to refine them and recharge. This allows them to be as powerful and persuasive as possible when networking situations arise.

I recognized that one-on-one conversations would be my lifeline during networking. Generally speaking, business events — and particularly networking events that require engaging with groups — are demanding for introverts. An antidote to this, I learned, is to seek out conversations with one individual at a time. When I approach events this way I have more productive conversations and form better business relationships — and I'm less drained by the experience.

**I stopped being afraid to be the one to reach out.**

My inner introvert used to think that making the effort to introduce myself was risky. I worried that my target would not be interested in talking with me or that I would make them uncomfortable. I learned over time that when I extended my hand with a smile and an introduction my effort would be reciprocated, even when I approached executives above my rank.

Social media makes this is easier than ever. Reach out via LinkedIn, Twitter and even Facebook to people who will be attending conferences or networking events you're going to and let them know you're looking forward to meeting them. This pre-introduction leads to a more relaxed and productive in-person connection. By reaching out, you open the door to potentially rewarding business collaborations, and you do so on your own terms.

**I learned to prioritize time to re-energize.**

While it can be tempting to go from a networking lunch right back to work, or from a networking cocktail event right to a dinner, if you're an introvert and you do that you won't be able to bring your best self to your next commitment. Take the time to recharge, whether by walking from the lunch back to work, or by finding 30 minutes alone between cocktails and dinner.

Introverts who avoid networking are making a critical career mistake. Being an adroit networker is non-negotiable — and not as hard as it might seem.

If you're an introvert, what networking strategies have you found that work?