



10 Steps to happy networking with Latino bicultural audiences

(Or Hispanic bicultural networking for the shy and faint of heart!)

Networking, an opportunity to promote yourself, your business or your cause can be a pleasant situation for some of us but a dreadful nightmare for those who are shy in new environments or just hate to talk about themselves.

Well, I wanted to share my experience as a prolific networker and easy-going bilingual business owner who has collected over 8000 small business and professional contacts, personally and through social media, and have experimented with different approaches in both the traditional American business community –which for the purpose of this article we will call “general market”– and the Latino business community.

Of course it was not as easy when I started my business [LCSWorldwide](#) many years ago. Those were the times when you had to work “cold calling” people and networking was just for the few. I had no idea how to prepare myself or what the purpose of meeting a full room of strangers was!

See, I do have a past life. In Argentina, I was a college professor –that is why I have a passion for teaching- but I didn’t need to attract or “sell” people into my products or services. They will just show up at the classroom and would be my captive audience for the rest of the year!

So everything changed when I arrived to the Big Apple. Despite having the advantage of speaking English, it was hard “to communicate” in the right ways to be able to gain people’s trust and their business. And harder to overcome my own fears, such as [having a heavy Hispanic accent](#) –until I realized I could use it as a great advantage!

Is networking different in different cultures? You bet!

“Many people stress over the pressure of trying to connect quickly and impressively with [complete strangers](#). Some even stay away because they can't get comfortable with the idea,” says expert [Lolly Daskal](#), president and CEO of [Lead From Within](#), a global consultancy that specializes in leadership and entrepreneurial development.

I have put together a series of steps that might make your networking experience a real success! With practice, you will find that these steps –and other tricks you might come up with on your own- will come to you naturally!

Some of these steps are common to both the traditional and the Latino markets but I will point out some differences when it comes to reading people in the room, introducing yourself or coming up with conversation starters.

Being a good listener and observer is instrumental in becoming a good networker. Remember the saying “God gave us one mouth but two ears” –and I would add–, two eyes!

Step 1. Prepare before you go

Always prepare yourself with some basic information about the crowd you are going to encounter and what your goal in meeting this crowd is. Are you looking for new prospect clients or are you looking to establish your credibility? Are you interested in becoming part of this organization – maybe board member or even president? Would you like to find some people within your industry to exchange ideas, mentors or mentees? Do you want to recruit employees or become a vendor?

Having a clear goal in your mind will determine your actions and your behavior within the group, and will give you goals to concentrate on and ease the nerves! By the way, it is also OK to just go for fun and have a good time!

Essential:

- a. Bring enough business cards to cover the whole session
- b. Prepare your elevator pitch and have some additional information about your business or activity (such as facts and figures in your industry, but do not use them unless necessary!)

You might be interested in: [Dress for Success helps women achieve their goals](#)

Step 2. Read the room

Once you get to the event, it is useful to “read the room.” Some events are set up so everybody is supposed to listen to a keynote speaker or speaker panel. You will have to decide if listening to the speaker/speakers is more important for you than networking among the participants –again, going back to your step 1.

If the speaker is not of your interest or you can reach them at another time or you already know their “spiel,” then you better start working the room. See who is there and how people are situated. The places people chose to participate at an event are crucial in understanding who they are or what they are there for.

Please, please, please:

1. Be very careful not to approach people when the speaker or speakers are talking
2. Be very respectful of the program and its schedule

Step 3. Read the people in the room

Who is there and where are they situated? If the event is around a speaker, then people would be looking at the stage or podium. Shy people would be at the sidelines while people who know each other or the organization would be either gathering together –especially if they want to suck up to the attention of the higher ups– or just sticking to the people they know –yeah, shy people also do that!

Your goal is to meet people for a specific purpose so remember to start moving around! Do you know who the people you'd like to meet are? If they are members of the organization, then you should be able to recognize them and approach them with ease –if you did your homework. These days with social media and Google, there are no excuses to not knowing how people you want to meet look like.

Step 4. What to expect before you start a conversation

Ok so now the situation starts to get a little different depending on your audience. Are you in a Latino event or a general market event?

If you are Latino at a Latino event: At the risk of sounding “politically incorrect,” I try to play the “Do you speak Spanish?” card. I know it doesn't always pay off, but it saves a lot of time and it is a great ice breaker. Of course I might judge the book by its cover and many times I've got the answer “No, I'm sorry, I'm third generation Mexican American and I don't speak Spanish.” Either way, it is a great way to start a conversation about them, who they are, where they come from, their ancestry, and their goal at that particular event.

If you are a Latino at a general market event: Well, this situation changes everything because you are expected to talk quickly and briefly about who you are and what you do. Americans are known around the world for their preference to talk about work instead of their personal life in a public setting –quite opposite, I might say, from us Latinos. It is expected you have a business card at hand and clearly explain the nature of your business or activity: In business, your “elevator pitch,” a real short intro of your business and your goals.

Step 5. Stay on message

If you are Latino at a Latino event: Then the conversation can go places and it would depend on you keeping it on target, whatever your target is. After you have talked about some personal matters like country of origin, how much you liked visiting the country they –or their parents- are from or some story showing that you are familiar with their origins, bring the conversation back to your goal. Start talking business!

Be yourself and be authentic, people notice if you are not. I've been very lucky to have the opportunity to travel throughout many countries in Latin America but if you did not, find some commonalities with your interlocutor, bringing up common issues of age or gender, family or even race. The conversation will flow if you are YOU but it is all about THEM!

Now, even if you love their stories, remember you need to keep your business goal on target! Developing a friendship can always be done after hours; now is your opportunity to do some business!

If you are a Latino at a general market event: Now after a short introduction –your elevator pitch cannot be more than 30 seconds-, you will want to center your attention in your interlocutor. Who are they and why are they there?

[Bill Cates](#), from Hubspot, offers some conversation starters such as:

1. Why are you here?

- “What made you come to this event today?” or “What brought you here?”
- “Do you come here often?” (You can have fun with this one.)
- “Why did you decide to join this organization?”

2. What is your goal today?

- “What is your goal for today’s meeting? What would make the meeting a success for you?”
- “What’s your goal for tonight? I have an idea. How about I help you reach your goal and maybe you can help me reach mine. Deal?”

3. Someone to meet?

- “Is there someone here you want to meet? Maybe I can help make that happen.”
- “I’m new to this group. If you were in my shoes, who would you be trying to meet?”

With these questions, you might discover if they fit the profile of person you are looking to meet that night. Ask questions that are professional and not personal –usually Americans do not disclose a lot of personal information in a first encounter. Again, be yourself; tell them it is your first, second time there and that you are looking to whatever it is you are doing there! The networking interaction with Americans is more “transactional,” and they will be happy to point you in the right direction instead of wasting their time –and yours- in chitchatting –as you can see in the questions Cates suggested!

Step 6. Move along

Once you have determined if your first target is the right one or not, or once you have gathered the information you needed, the contact information you requested or the industry insight you were looking for, then start moving along.

You can just say “I’m going for a drink,” like in any other party or you can just simply say, “Hey, I would like to connect with you at a later time if that is OK with you,” to announce that you are leaving. Say your “good-byes” in a polite and meaningful way, MEAN IT! Make sure you have the information you need!

Then approach your next “target” and start from Step 4.

Step 7. Take a break, take notes

I always recommend –especially if you meet someone who is particularly interesting to your pursue–, to take a break and make some notes –who they are, what they do, what they mentioned about a new development or why it is important to contact them at a later time. When you go to networking events several times a month, it is difficult to remember who you met and who they are. A quick note will do, something to jog your memory!

Step 8. Prioritize your new contacts

Some contacts are important and some are not but you would not know who is and who isn't until many months later. When you go back to the office, prioritize new contacts that are more related to your goal at that particular event –which doesn't mean you cannot talk and collect other contacts for additional purposes.

Step 9. Follow up gently (social media included!)

Add the new contacts to your mailing list and follow up gently. I hate when people write me the “mandatory” next day email without any type of personal touch. Say “I thank you for mentioning your such and such business or such vendor opportunity last night” or “I enjoyed our conversation on such and such topic.” Americans also like the personal touch! Do not overdo it, and please do not try to make a sale on this first contact! You just met this person and unless your conversation with them reached the point that allows you to do it, then refrain and build momentum slowly. We all hate “business bullies” –no matter what culture you are in! Remember, our good friend Ted Rubin always say: It is all about ROR - [Return on Relationships!](#)

If you have a solution for their problems, they will certainly be glad that you connected with them!

Look for their contact information on social media, even check their websites if they are in your priority list. Websites and social media say a lot about people! You might find a lot more information about who they are and what they can bring to your business. Do not forget to check them on LinkedIn –also, you would be surprised at some pictures you'll find compared to the real person you just met the night before!

Step 10. Make your move

Once you have received a response from your target, then it is time to make your move. If they do not respond in 48 hours, you can send them a reminder of your conversation and tell them you'd like to set up a phone conversation or other way of professional contact. It will all depend on the

goal you are pursuing with this particular prospect. This second contact would be a good opportunity to tell them a little more about your business and why you are pursuing to establish a professional relationship with them. Be ready for rejections, 80 percent of networking contacts do not respond positively in your first approach but down the road, this particular prospect might bring you the business, recruit or opportunity you are looking for.

Remember the Golden Rule: It is not who YOU know but who THEY know. An apparent unproductive contact for a sale or recruit might bring you the right person at the right time.

In summary:

Networking Checklist:

Step 1. Prepare before you go

Step 2. Read the room

Step 3. Read the people in the room

Step 4. What to expect before you start a conversation

Step 5. Stay on message

Step 6. Move along

Step 7. Take a break, take notes

Step 8. Prioritize your new contacts

Step 9. Follow up gently (social media included)

Step 10. Make your move

Happy networking!

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Did you find these bicultural networking tips useful?

If you did –or if you didn’t- we would love to hear from you. Are there any other tips you have used to become a successful bilingual and bicultural networker? Please write to me at Susana@latinasinbusiness.us and I will be glad to respond to your comments!

Other resources:

<http://www.inc.com/lolly-daskal/perfect-icebreakers-8-smart-phrases-that-will-make-you-better-at-networking.html>

About Susana and LatinasinBusiness.us

Susana G. Baumann is the owner and Director of LCSWorldwide Language and Multicultural Marketing Communications, a consulting firm currently located in New Jersey, USA.

A multicultural marketing expert, business writer and published author, advocated for Latinos in the United States early on, when Hispanic was a “bad word” and companies did not fully recognize the economic power of a burgeoning population.

In 2013, she received the “Journalist of the Year” award from the Statewide Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey for her service and advocacy to Latino small businesses.

LatinasinBusiness.us, a leading national digital platform that advocates for the economic empowerment of Latinas in business and the workplace is the Winner of the [Latina Excellence Award](#) at LISTA Summit 2015 and the [TECLA Awards for Best Business Blog](#) at Hispanicize 2015!

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