



NETWORKING

# 7 STEPS TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS BY MAKING NEW FRIENDS **KENT CROOK**



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Cover Design: Eric Keller, [eric@erickellerdesign.com](mailto:eric@erickellerdesign.com)

Interior Layout: Eric Keller

Illustration: Edwin Blanco, [edwin@blanco.net](mailto:edwin@blanco.net)

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# INTRODUCTION

Networking is crucial to running a successful business. It makes new connections and fosters better relationships with existing ones. Many business owners, however, have difficulty in group settings. I can help you network like a Rock Star.

I have owned 22 businesses. The current one, an electrical service company, WireMasters Electric, in six years expanded from two techs and two trucks to twenty-five employees and ten trucks. It produces a good living for my family as well as my employees' families.

Networking alone won't get the job done. It also takes over-the-top customer service, competent work, and a commit-

ment to old-fashioned values of respect — and making absolutely certain the work is done satisfactorily.

People do business with people they know, like and trust. Our business growth is proof that the best way to build a profitable business is one loyal customer at a time — who not only is satisfied with your work but also knows you as a human being.

I am the one who shines at a networking event even when I know absolutely no one. In fact, that's when I make the best connections. You can, too.

These Seven Steps to Becoming a Rock Star Networker is all you need to know to shine during a networking event — and more importantly to overcome fears, grow your business and advance your professional development.



## STEP 1

# THROW AWAY YOUR BUSINESS CARDS

The most aggravating person at a networking event is the one who walks around forcing business cards on everyone in the room. That's why Step 1 is Throw Away Your Business Cards!

No, not literally. Let me explain. When you're meeting people for the first time at a networking event, you aren't there solely for self-promotion. Most networkers would agree that the thing they find most annoying is the overly friendly business card giver. Before you can even say your name and what you do, he's already handing you a card.

Before you throw around business cards, first understand who the person is and what he or she does. Not everyone is “business card worthy.” They may not be a match for what you do or what you’re there to promote. In my experience, only about 50 percent of the people you meet will actually be an immediate connection. Often it takes multiple visits before you make an actual connection. Be patient and don’t get overly friendly when handing out cards. If you do, the receiver will sense the tactic you’re using. I’m about 99 percent positive that your business card will end up in that circular green file cabinet under letter “G.” Catch my drift?

It’s important to show your audience the respect they deserve and actually speak with them. Sit down and actually engage in a meaningful conversation. That’s how you begin to build a relationship that could lead to something even better down the line.



## STEP 2

(and this one's a biggie)

# FORGET YOUR FRIENDS

And boy do I mean it. One of the biggest mistakes future Rock Star Networkers make at a networking event is staying attached at the hip with their friends or colleagues. They refuse to circulate the room or meet new people.

This is a huge mistake because it makes you look like a follower rather than a confident networker. You want to show that you're a leader and know how to conduct yourself in a business manner. Sticking with the same crew does not portray this at all.



Don't get me wrong, it's important to know people wherever you go. It demonstrates that you're connected, especially if you're coming to that event for the first time. But when you walk in, briefly say hello to your friends (you don't want to be rude, of course), and then excuse yourself and work the room.

Trust me; you'll thank me on this one.



## STEP 3

# ESCAPE YOUR COMFORT ZONE

You go to networking events to meet like-minded people or to grow your business. So stop bundling yourself up in the corner and venture into the crowd.

Come up with your elevator speech, (a quick one- or two-minute spiel about yourself) and your work, and go out and work the room. Make an agreement with yourself that you're going to go home from each event with five new contacts or connections. But don't get caught up in the minutia of whether a person likes you or not. Just focus on meeting new people and expanding your

horizons.

Even when you recognize within the first two or three minutes of speaking with someone new that it's not going to be a good connection, don't crawl up into a ball and alienate yourself from the rest of the room. Go on to the next person and see if you can make some magic happen.



## STEP 4

# STOP SELLING AND START LISTENING

Another undesirable networker is the one who suffers from “word vomit,” someone who gives you more information than you ever even asked for, no matter what. You could find something in common to try to connect with that person, but no matter what you say, he will turn things around to focus the attention on himself.

RUN AWAY ... but there's a lesson to learn; stop selling yourself and start listening.

The key to business conversation is to listen to all sides of the story and respond when you have an adequate story to tell.

Of course, don't go for long moments of silence or talk so long that your audience disengages. Find the balance between selling and listening, with listening being predominant.



## STEP 5

### FIND SOMETHING IN COMMON

One of the most difficult steps is finding something in common, mainly because to do this, you have to be an intuitive thinker. Intuition means listening to what someone is telling you and finding the feedback that allows you to connect with that person. Easy things to find in common with your audience include:

**1. The weather:** One of the more bland connection topics, but observations about the weather has been a good place to start.

2. **Where you grew up or were born:** The easiest way to connect if there's something in common.
3. **Your kids:** Parents hang out with parents. If you have kids, that's a good way to connect with someone else because chances are that you're going through or have gone through similar things they are experiencing.
4. **Similar job or industry:** Nothing more in common than speaking to a person who has walked in your shoes or knows your day-to-day business challenges.



## STEP 6

# FAKE IT TILL YOU MAKE IT

Sometimes you might find yourself slightly over your head in a conversation with someone who could be a great connection. I don't know everything about everything, and neither does anyone else. Trying to pretend that's the case is boring. How can you ever truly connect with someone or learn something new if you constantly carry the "I know everything" attitude? You can't. If you aren't open to new ideas or opportunities, you'll never allow yourself to grow.



There are three routes you can take;

**1. Play the “know it all” card.** If so, people will perceive you as pompous and not want to engage with you ... or even really talk to you.

**2. Do nothing different and hope for the best.** The avoidance technique is not one of my favorites.

**3. FAKE IT TILL YOU MAKE IT** (my favorite). This technique encompasses a little dabble of sharing things you do know (that make sense, of course), while adding engaging questions so your audience becomes a mentor or teacher for you. It really is the best approach because as you continue to FAKE IT, you'll find out before long that you actually MADE IT.



## STEP 7

### FOLLOW UP

I have seen so many networkers perform like Rock Stars at networking events and then you NEVER hear from them afterwards. This is an epic fail.

Whether the connection seemed useful or not, a contact is a contact. You never know when someone you met and spoke with for even two minutes will become valuable. So it is worth it to make at least one post-meeting connection. It can be as simple as an email: "It was a pleasure to meet you at the Chamber mixer. I look forward to what the future may hold for us."

Here's how to use contact information:

- 1. Put the contact information in your phone or computer,** and make sure that it syncs with your other devices.
- 2. Send a thank you note** and let them know that you've kept their contact info.
- 3. Give a brief reminder** (and I mean two short sentences or less) about what you do or what you talked about (this is how you make the relationship more personal).

Some of my absolute BEST networking connections were after I had spoken to a person multiple times. It was only after weeks or multiple events with that same person that we finally connected and developed a long-term business relationship.



## IN CLOSING

If you follow the 7 Steps, you'll soon find yourself much more comfortable getting out and meeting new and interesting people — many of whom would love to do business with you.

Remember, hitting the networking circuit alone won't make your business a winner. It also requires competent performance and over-the-top customer service from your team.

But the one thing that Rock Star Networkers have that most businesses yearn for is a phone that rings, and rings, and rings . . . .

Happy networking, Rock Stars!



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# BUILD YOUR BUSINESS FAST BY LISTENING — NOT SELLING.

## KENT CROOK EXPLAINS HOW TO:

- Overcome social fear
- Chat up strangers comfortably
- Build an ever-growing list of business contacts and new customers

**F**lorida electrician Kent Crook built a successful company from 2 guys and 2 trucks to 25 employees and 10 trucks in just 6 years with competent performance and great customer service. But Kent attributes much of his growth to networking — going out to meet new customers and making friends in person.



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