

Principles of Networking Naturally

For some people, networking can feel uncomfortable and contrived, and even cause social paralysis (also known as being “tongue-tied”.) For others, just the thought of an upcoming networking event can produce an inordinate amount of gut-wrenching, tummy flip-flopping stress. Ever notice the lucky few, who seem to be so at ease with networking that it’s no different than driving to the grocery store for a gallon of milk? Why the difference? And is it possible to learn to network so that it feels more natural?

While successful networkers each have their own style, the most effective networkers I’ve seen follow the same underlying principles. They may not be conscious of what makes them so effective, but nevertheless, they follow these principles to guide their behavior. You can learn these principles, too, and develop a style of networking that is more natural for you.

Here are the Eight Principles of Networking Naturally. I use a cow metaphor (yes, cows!) to help you remember the principles when you are networking:

1. **Principle #1: Instead of buying a gallon of milk, get to know the cow.** Successful networkers are relationship-based, not transaction-based. Networking requires an investment in time and effort to create a long-term relationship, rather than learning a slick one-time opening line.
2. **Principle #2: Focus on more than the udder.** (Bad pun intended.) **Get to know the whole cow.** Successful networkers have a genuine interest in people, as people. They see past an impressive title or powerful position or profitable business opportunity and spend time getting to know the whole person—from that person’s interests outside of work to what books she likes to read to who she is as a parent.
3. **Principle #3: Listen for the mooing.** Successful networkers listen more than talk. They are curious and prefer to learn about the other person before saying much about themselves.
4. **Principle #4: Moo about where the grass is.** Successful networkers offer up value first, before asking for anything. They give without strings attached and are confident in their ability to give. They interact with others from a

mindset of “How can I help you?” yet also know their boundaries in order to avoid burning out.

5. **Principle #5: Cows are everywhere.** Successful networkers know that networking happens anywhere, anytime, not just at “networking events.” Networking can happen at the dog park or in the dentist’s office just as easily as at an industry conference or social gathering.
6. **Principle #6: Be a cow among cows.** Starting out, successful networkers treat everyone equally. They see individuals not as “more than” or “less than” but rather “better at” or “worse at” different things. They don’t let egos get in the way of connecting with others. Likewise, they are not afraid to approach people as people, independent of their positional authority or stature in society.
7. **Principle #7: Be an upstanding cow.** Successful networkers focus on building trust. They keep their word, act with integrity, and treat the relationship with care. They create trust by being authentic and trustworthy.
8. **Principle #8: Put yourself in the other cow’s hooves.** Successful networkers are gracious. They give others the benefit of the doubt and don’t take things personally. They are sensitive to making the other person uncomfortable.

These eight principles may sound like a lot more than networking. That’s because successful networking requires each of us to be the type of person that *we* would want to meet—someone who has a generous spirit, an open mind, and an authentic voice. Practice all eight of these principles (yes, it only works if you put them into action!) and watch how developing mutually beneficial relationships enriches every part of your life.

Copyright © 2011 Carol Ross and Associates, LLC. www.carolrossandassociates.com. Carol Ross is a career coach, entrepreneur, and writer with more than two decades of corporate and entrepreneurial experience. She coaches professionals (especially [boundary crossers](#)) to not only be better leaders, but live better stories. Carol’s career advice has been featured in [The Wall Street Journal](#), [The New York Times](#), The Boston Globe, Chicago Tribune, [U.S. News & World Report](#), and [Body + Soul](#). She has been described by NYT best-selling author, Daniel Pink, as the “intelligent professional’s guide to navigating careers in a world where being competent is not enough”. A social media enthusiast since 2005, you can find her on Twitter: @carolross, [LinkedIn](#), or at her blogs, [A Bigger Voice](#), and [Ordinary Life, Extraordinary Living](#). Contact her at carol@carolrossandassociates.com for a complimentary career consultation.