

5 WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR NETWORKING SKILLS

by David Whitemyer, AIA



Whether you're a frequent attendee of A/E conferences, one of your firm's business development up-and-comers, or simply someone who comes into contact with clients, you need to be a skilled networker. The easiest and most proven method for winning A/E projects is from creating and maintaining solid, friendly relationships with past and potential clients.

Here are 5 tips on becoming a better networker, which are useful for both introverts and extroverts, rookie designers, and seasoned firm leaders.

1. Become a Better Speaker

If you're not a good public speaker, or you get nervous talking in front of crowds, fix it! Don't avoid it, and don't wait for these feelings to go away by themselves. You need to be a confident speaker in order to network successfully.

ACTION – Ask the owner(s) of your firm if he/she would pay for a speaking coach to come in and meet with the staff. Consider enrolling in a speech class at a local community college. Or connect with a local affiliate of ToastMasters International (www.toastmasters.org).

2. Read & Research

It's much easier to carry on conversations with others in the A/E industry if you know what's going on in the A/E industry. And your knowledge and confidence on industry-related subjects will come across when you speak.

ACTION – You know that copy of Architectural Record that's been sitting on your desk collecting dust for a month? Read it. Scroll through ArchDaily.com every couple of days to learn about what's going on. And take advantage of free articles and courses for your required annual Continued Education Units.

3. Package Your Pitch

Always be prepared for the 60-second elevator pitch, to share – in as brief a moment as possible – the story and strengths of your A/E firm. Practice your pitch periodically, so that you don't stumble when it really counts.

ACTION – Also, make sure you always have materials – or “leave behinds” – on hand to strengthen your pitch. Consider designing a small pocket-sized color booklet with minimal, but powerful, text and great photos of your work. You could also produce a short video to share with people on your smartphone. Checkout Minute-Movie (www.minute-movie.com) for some examples done by other A/E firms.

4. Get Out There!

You can't rely on just the phone and email to stay connected with clients and colleagues. You need to show your face. To be a successful networker, get up out of your chair and get out there!

ACTION – Look for industry-related events to attend, and commit to at least one per month. If you're nervous, invite an office-mate along. Attend conferences. Attend committee meetings hosted by your local AIA chapter or other related association.

5. Follow-Up

The easiest way for new and even fostered connections to remember who you are and where you work is to follow up with them after a meeting, as well as a few months after your most recent contact with them.

ACTION – The day after meeting someone new, send him/her a quick email to say that you enjoyed the conversation. Include a link to an article you think s/he'll find interesting. Better yet, mail a handwritten, personal note. These are becoming so rare that it'll stand out well. ●



David Whitemyer, AIA, is a Contributing Editor at PSMJ Resources, Inc., a licensed architect, and project manager at Brent Johnson Design, a Boston-area firm. He can be reached at dwhitemyer@psmj.com.