



HOW TO DO SOCIAL EVENTS WHEN YOU DON'T REALLY WANT TO

By Sue-Ella Prodonovich

Yep, it's that time of year again. The holidays are on the horizon, the mad rush to finish this year's work is underway, and the Christmas party invites are coming in.

These end-of-year events can be a great place to network. They often give us the chance to meet new clients and referrers, cement existing relationships, and let everyone know we're out and about and going strong.

After two years of very little mass social activity, the extraverts among us are probably champing at the bit to get back into these events to press the flesh (well, maybe elbow bump) and start socialising in person once again. But for the introverts - or at least the less enthusiastic socialisers - the silly season can fast become the stressful season, as forced interaction on a grand scale gives rise to anxiety, trepidation and eventually exhaustion.

If this sounds like you, read on because - even if it may not seem like it - introverts, I am one of you. Don't get me wrong; I love people, and I love socialising (up to a point), but, like you, I find I'd be just as happy sitting at home with a quordle and a club sandwich. (And that's exactly what I need to do after a few events).

With that in mind, I'm here to tell you that, with these tips, you won't just get through the next couple of months; you may even find them both rewarding and - dare I say - enjoyable.

1. BE PREPARED

My experience is that a lot of introverts don't like small talk. I get that. But, armed with the right background information, there's no reason you shouldn't be able to get through and have some stimulating conversation.

I'm a firm believer in the idea that you should know your audience. That means understanding who they are before you get into the function (you could even ask for guest lists if it helps) and what their frames of reference are likely to be.

This was rammed home to me recently when I spoke to a group of young accountants about their personal brand and tried to get the conversation started by talking about the surgeon Dr Charlie Teo, who was on the front page of the Sydney Morning Herald that day. None of them had ever heard of him. (They'd probably not heard the concept of a front page either) and the tumbleweeds started drifting in. Eventually, someone spoke up, and the conversation turned to Kanye West/Ye's recent remarks and instead, I found myself out of my depth too.

2. ASK QUESTIONS

Most introverts tend to be considerate listeners, so use this to your advantage. Be prepared to keep the conversation going by asking questions and having extraverts do the talking. (They'll probably relish the opportunity anyway).

You should do your background here also and find out a bit about the people, firms, companies or others involved. That way, you can even have a few prepared questions beforehand. Just don't make it too obvious.

3. TALK ABOUT OTHERS

Another thing I find introverts often feel uneasy about is talking about themselves. But often they're very good at recognising the ability of others. So, when it's your turn to talk, be prepared to speak about the others in your firm. Be generous: arm yourself with their stories and use their experiences. Dale Carnegie once said that [you could make more friends in two months by being interested in others](#) than in two years by trying to get people interested in you.

4. GET READY TO SPEAK ABOUT YOURSELF ANYWAY

I know this is probably going to make you decidedly uncomfortable, but you still will need to be prepared to talk about yourself at some stage in proceedings. Again, this doesn't have to be all about you though. Think about what you've enjoyed and observed over the last year. Have some 'hero stories' that you can use (these could also involve other people) that describe your firm in an interesting way.

For instance, when I was at Arthur Andersen many moons ago, we dined out on being the firm that helped Sydney win the 2000 Olympics. People loved hearing about it, and we made the most of it. For years.

5. GET READY TO FAKE IT

I'm a big believer in the idea that you should '[fake it till you make it](#)'. So, even if you really don't feel like going to that event, take a deep breath, pull those shoulders back, stand tall and look confident anyway. Research shows your physical posture can trick your reserved brain into having fun.

Have a tactic for when you enter the room - like staying on the periphery at first (just not behind the Aspidistra) where it's cooler and less crowded. (Leave the bear pit to the extraverts). Use your time here to familiarise yourself with the layout and scout out a quiet place you can go to if you get away momentarily. That could be the reception hall, balcony or even the bathroom.

This is where you'll go when you need to recharge.

6. HAVE A STRATEGY

When you do go into the fray, look for someone who you know or a group you can join.

There was a great piece in AFR's Boss Magazine recently that said [communication is usually done in pairs](#). So the easiest way to join a conversation is to look for an odd number of people. If you find a group of three, with someone you know in it, you've hit the socialising jackpot.

Another tactic is to go into any situation with your glass half full - don't ever have it topped up completely. That way, you'll always have an escape plan if you need it. (I just need to top up my drink.) And, when it is time to leave a big ballroom-event, don't be afraid to do an Irish Goodbye and just disappear.

You don't need [more farewells than Dame Nellie Melba](#). Just skip out if you need to and send an email to the people who matter the next day, letting them know you missed them on the way out.

7. DO IT ON YOUR TERMS

Finally, and my best piece of advice for end-of-year socialising as an introvert is to do it on your terms. Arrive early with a buddy if you can and limit your time – 2 hours will exhaust most introverts (and why events that involve a bus or a boat may not be everyone's cup-of-tea).

Or hold your own social event, where you're the one who invites people to a space you feel comfortable in, and in a format with which you're comfortable too.

Or find your own tribe of quiet people at a big function and stake out a corner.

That way, you'll know exactly what you're in for and you won't have any of that unpleasant social anxiety that keeps you up at night.

WANT MORE?

If you'd like to know more about successful networking, [get in touch](#).

FURTHER READING AND REFERENCES

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Sue-Ella is the Principal of Prodonovich Advisory, a business dedicated to helping professional services practices sharpen their business development practices, attract and retain clients and become more profitable.

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