

Talk your way to a better job

If you shudder at the idea of networking, you haven't done it **Nicole Lapin's** way. Follow her advice and you'll make real connections that'll get you ahead.



LOVE MEETING NEW PEOPLE, but not while wearing a name tag and collecting business cards. I used to think those two things were the icky requirements of networking, but I'm glad I was wrong. I've realized over the years that networking is just a scary word for staying in touch with people, and that

it's also the number-one way to land a better, more gratifying job. It's vital you get out there, have some conversations, and build connections—this is how to keep your hand in, or get it back in the game. I suspect you are awesome at what you do, so let's make sure the people who can help you realize it too.

MOVE THE COURSE

When I first started working, I thought I needed to play golf with the men to be part of the negotiations that are said to happen on the green. In fact, I even signed up for a golf lesson to try to join in on those meetings. But I hated every minute of that first class.

Luckily, I learned one thing in the process: Business can be done anywhere. I got off the course and headed somewhere I felt comfortable instead—restaurants. I joined an eating club and made lasting connections doing something I love (after all, a girl's gotta eat). Focus on what makes you a better, more interesting person, whether it's charity work or yoga, and make it a point to connect with people there. If you actually like golf, more power to you! But don't be someone you're not for the sake of networking.

BE A COOL CONVERSATIONALIST

Any time you're going to a gathering with people you're excited to meet, prep before you get there. I know it sounds weird, but coming from a person who used to have anxiety introducing herself to strangers, planning ahead truly is the best way to come across well. Plus, it will make it more likely that the folks you're meeting will be glad to have found you too.

On LinkedIn, look up a few things about the people with whom you're hoping to network—but don't add them as a connection just yet. Use this info to ask thoughtful questions about what they're working on, or bring up contacts you have in common. If the conversation drops, talk about sports or movies. Just don't mention the weather as an icebreaker. We get it, it's raining outside; you're more creative than that!

MAINTAIN THE RELATIONSHIP

To keep track of people, add a few tidbits about the person in the "notes" section of their contact page in your phone. This way, you can allude to something you talked about when you follow up. Now is also a good time to connect on LinkedIn. If you didn't catch their phone number, message them through the site.

When suggesting another meeting, be really specific about times you're available. Instead of asking if they're free sometime next week, say, "How's Tuesday at 10 a.m. or Thursday between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.?" This will skip the dreaded back-and-forth, which can be enough to kill a relationship before it has the chance to start creating new opportunities for you.

Former CNBC and CNN anchor Nicole Lapin is the author of the financial best-seller *Rich Bitch* and one of the stars of the CW show *Hatched*.