

## How to Network if You're Shy

*by Josiah Mackenzie*

One of the biggest deterrents to effective networking is shyness and the lack of confidence to get out there and meet new people. Even if you consider yourself a naturally outgoing person, you've probably had moments where the thought of entering a room full of strangers made you nervous.

First, you need to realize that the majority of people are shy - at least in certain situations. You're not the only one! I've found that once you adopt this realization, it does wonders for you. See that executive standing by himself? Deep beneath all the power and prestige there's probably a shy man wishing and waiting for someone to strike up a conversation with him.

Next, practice your networking skills with friends and family. Make a list of all the people you see frequently, but maybe haven't had the chance to talk with recently. As the situation permits, practice the art of small talk with these people who you know are friendly toward you. The same skills you use with your family and friends can be used for "friends you haven't met yet."

Another good tactic is to find someone who is naturally extroverted, and get him or her to introduce you to others. This works well for two reasons. First, it will be much easier to meet new people. Your friend will act as the link between you and the person you're meeting - providing information and getting a conversation started. Second, your talkative friend will help cover any awkward gaps in conversation.

Networking with an extroverted friend can be helpful at first, but you can't rely on them forever. Eventually, you'll have to step out on your own and do the meeting yourself.

When that time comes, I suggest you look for the wallflowers. Wallflowers are other shy people who like to stand by themselves, away from others. People like the shy executive I used as an illustration earlier are just waiting for others to come and talk with them. Be that person and reap the rewards!

If you don't want to be always seeking others out, position yourself so they come to you. Put yourself in situations that force you to meet new people. Work at a reception desk. Offer to be a greeter for an event. You'll find it very easy to talk with people when they come to you.

Finally, I would encourage you to continually develop your conversational skills. By reading a couple good books on the art of talking with others you'll develop your ability to effectively communicate with others. I guarantee that when you come to an event with five fail-proof ways to start a conversation, you'll be far more confident when it comes time to enter a room full of new people.