

Gender Equality Network podcast Networking Demystified

Deborah Carter	Welcome to this Gender Equality Network podcast on demystifying networking. I am Deborah Carter, an L&D Manager....
Tanja Velling	<p>...and I am Tanja Velling, Senior Professional Support Lawyer in the Tax department and chair of the Gender Equality Network.</p> <p>In this podcast, we will be discussing how to make a memorable first impression, starting and keeping the conversation going, extracting yourself from conversations, working the room and following up.</p>
Deborah Carter	<p>So, why this podcast? Well many of you will have attended specific networking events or events that have presented networking opportunities, for instance the Grosvenor Dinner Dance. Networking covers a big client event or even chatting to one or two other people over coffee.</p> <p>For those of you who have completed psychometric tests, you'll know that some personalities are generally assumed to find talking to others easier than others. However, most people will at some point or another attend a networking event that they find daunting because, networking by its nature, takes us all out of our comfort zone. Human nature means we concentrate on ourselves and what we've said or not said. Tanja, is something which resonates with you?</p>
Tanja Velling	<p>Oh, yes. Absolutely. Only recently, someone told me that I seem really confident and that they thought I was good at networking, but that is absolutely not how I feel! Networking events quite literally terrify me – to the extent that my palms start to sweat uncontrollably which then makes me even more nervous!</p> <p>But the worst is this constant stream of negative thoughts, like, will anyone want to talk to me? Surely, nobody will want to talk to me! Because what could I possibly contribute? I will have nothing interesting to say... and on and on that goes. I used to think that, over time, it would get better; that, if I just forced myself to go to more events, it would get better. But it hasn't really, or at least not very much.</p> <p>Do you have any idea how I might adjust my thinking? Is there perhaps a better way of thinking about networking?</p>
Deborah Carter	Well, yes, actually there is, and so much of that is true for us all. True networking is actually really about listening. It's less about all the interesting things that we can think of to make ourselves look better, but more about showing a genuine interest in others and listening for ways in

	<p>which you may be able to help or be of service to them. It's essentially about developing relationships which, in itself, takes time.</p> <p>But, let's start with the all-important first impressions. Whilst networking is not about the "hard sell" when you introduce yourself you want to make sure you are creating a positive impression....</p>
<p>Tanja Velling</p>	<p>...yes, it's important to think about who you're talking to and how best to introduce yourself. This could be a client or a work colleague that you're meeting for the first time, or someone who might be a client in the future. You may have heard of the "elevator pitch", the idea that you have a captive audience for about 30 to 60 seconds before they walk away. How do you introduce yourself so that you can tell the person who you are, your skills, experience and knowledge in that time?</p> <p>This is one part of networking that can be prepared in advance. When considering your opening make sure you have done your research. What is the event or occasion you are attending? Are you meeting prospective clients, a new supervising partner, people in the firm with similar interests as you, or new work colleagues?</p>
<p>Deborah Carter</p>	<p>Yes, and is it an informal or formal event? How many people will be there?</p> <p>Depending on the occasion, you may want to add to your elevator pitch something that you've been involved with relevant to the event or person that you're speaking to. The important thing is that you are not just giving your name and job title but actually elaborating on who you are and leaving a memorable impression.</p>
<p>Tanja Velling</p>	<p>Exactly, for example, rather than saying "I'm Tanja Velling, Professional Support Lawyer at Slaughter and May." I might say "I'm Tanja Velling, Senior Professional Support Lawyer in the Slaughter and May Tax Department. Perhaps you've seen one of my posts on European Tax Blog or heard of the new Tax News Highlights podcast I co-present?"</p>
<p>Deborah Carter</p>	<p>Precisely – what you've just said also helps to open up the conversation.</p> <p>Before we talk about the conversation and working the room, it's also worth saying that first impressions are just as much about how you act as what you say. It's a fine line between being on the sidelines of the room and jumping in and talking over others.</p> <p>On a lighter note, it's also always worth thinking about whether there is food served at the event and in what form.</p> <p>Making sure to leave all coats and bags in the cloakroom or appropriate place will help make sure you are free to move about and talk.</p>

	<p>I once made the grave mistake of not doing this once and trying to make a positive impression on a prospective client whilst I was holding two bags, a coat, a glass of champagne and a canape which was no mean feat, I can tell you!</p>
<p>Tanja Velling</p>	<p>So, once you've made your initial approach how do you keep the conversation going? That's also something that you can prepare in advance. Having, introduced yourself make sure that you have a few different items to raise if the conversation looks like it's drying up. Research as far as possible the people you're meeting so you can ask them for their views on a topic of their expertise. For example, if you are meeting foreign lawyers, you could read up on the developments in their jurisdictions which are relevant to the event and ask them about those.</p> <p>For example, when I spoke to a Canadian lawyer during a recent tax event, I recalled that I had read about changes to a Canadian anti-tax abuse rule, so I asked his view about it and we chatted for quite a while because it turned out to be quite a hot topic in Canadian tax.</p>
<p>Deborah Carter</p>	<p>If it is a more informal (or less specialist) event, you can also think about current affairs, recent market developments or interesting news headlines.</p> <p>The important thing, I think, is to show interest and be focussed. Simple things like making sure your devices are switched on to silent and out of sight can make all the difference. Depending on the event, you might even just leave those devices outside the room to avoid the temptation to hide behind your screen.</p>
<p>Tanja Velling</p>	<p>That's quite an important point actually and there's a balance to be struck. You might want your phone with you to make it easier to exchange contact details. But especially when you're feeling shy or nervous, it can be rather tempting to just stand in the corner and pretend to check your emails. And I have definitely done that during lunch or coffee breaks at conferences. And that's fine, but it does mean that the whole event might end up being less enjoyable and that you miss out on what could have been really interesting conversations.</p> <p>And there's also another aspect. It may also happen that, after you've been speaking to various people for a while, you find that it's all become a bit much and you just want a little break. And that's fair enough and quite normal, and pulling out your phone can give you that breathing space. But I would argue that here could be better ways. Stepping outside for a while to get some fresh air, taking a few deep breaths or going to the bathroom, slowly washing your hands, taking note of the sensations. That's actually a popular mindfulness technique which can help you calm your thoughts and anchor yourself in the present. And it might sound a bit trite, but it can really help reset your frame of mind.</p>

Deborah Carter	<p>Yes, and more often than not, there are others who are probably feeling the same as you. So, physically if you are at a standing event, try to adopt open body language, your relaxed arms, expressive hands and appropriate eye contact. And also, a little tip is to try to stand so you are facing others as well as the people in your conversation. This way other people will be able to join your group by catching your eye or seeing an opening and, importantly, you can leave at the right moment without appearing rude.</p> <p>Although the event you are at may only be for a limited time, remember networking is not a sprint; it is a marathon. So, in order to make sure you are introducing yourself to the correct people take a minute to survey the room before you jump into a conversation. I've always found that going to the bar or food areas gives me the opportunity to take a breath, work out who I'd like to talk to and, if nothing else, I'm always guaranteed to meet other people getting a drink or some food from which conversations can start more naturally.</p>
Tanja Velling	<p>Going back to the idea of leaving your comfort zone, I have found that one key part of networking is to make sure you speak to as many people as are relevant to the occasion to widen your scope of contacts.</p>
Deborah Carter	<p>Yes, we've all been in a situation where maybe we've got cornered by one person and realise that we've been speaking to them for a long time or we actually just want to move away from the conversation and haven't found a polite way to do so. I make it a rule of thumb to try to talk to at least 5 or 6 different groups of people every hour. That's about 10 minutes per group of people. And obviously, it depends on the number of people and the event. At a smaller gathering, I might change that to 3 people or groups within the hour. If I am at a sit-down event, there is usually the opportunity to visit other tables, either between courses or at the end of the meal.</p> <p>Someone I know also works in a loose figure of eight pattern around a room. And that way, they make sure, they told me, that they're not only working the outside of the room, but also going through the inside.</p> <p>So, that's sort of working and making the conversation. But how do you exit the conversation? If it's a conversation in which I've been cornered, I have found the excuse of going to the ladies a very helpful one! I think having a couple of stock phrases to hand also really always helps.</p>
Tanja Velling	<p>Yes, so, when a conversation has a natural break, just keep it light and friendly, perhaps extend your hand to shake the person's hand or whatever custom is appropriate in the circumstances, and then you could say something like "it's been a pleasure talking you; here's my card so we can keep in touch" or you could say "it's been lovely to meet you; I've just seen a former colleague arrive and I should really go and speak to them."</p>

Deborah Carter	<p>Yeah, but mind you, it does all depend on the situation and tone. I've been at the receiving end of that last one and felt like the person just wanted to speak to someone else more than they wanted to speak to me and I was a bit of a stop-gap.</p> <p>But, on reflection, I don't think that was the case. I just think they hadn't thought it through and they hadn't really waited until a natural pause in the conversation. You know, if you leave mid-sentence, that is always going to come across as quite rude.</p> <p>I also find it generally harder to extract from conversation with people that you've got no intention of following up with. And I've always made it a rule of thumb that, if that's the case and you want to leave a positive lasting impression, then you still have to wait for that natural break in the conversation, judge the circumstances and be polite.</p>
Tanja Velling	<p>Another thing that's worth remembering is that the other person might actually be really thankful to you for breaking up the conversation. They might have wanted to do so, but were struggling find a way!</p> <p>And then another key tip for leaving a conversation is to plan where you will go next. Move with purpose to another group or person or another part of the room.</p>
Deborah Carter	<p>Oh, absolutely – it's so awkward if you left the conversation only to find yourself sort of milling around aimlessly.</p> <p>Now, what about the follow-up? In what ways have you followed up after a networking event?</p>
Tanja Velling	<p>Well, my best advice is to follow up by expanding on something you've talked about. Going back to my earlier example of the drinks where I spoke to a Canadian lawyer, we also discussed some recent tax cases in the UK which he seemed really interested in. So, the next day, I sent him the links to our client publications on these cases.</p> <p>So, when deciding how to follow up, ask yourself, did the person mention something the firm has written about that you can send them? Are there specific legal updates or newsletters that the firm sends out that could be of interest?</p> <p>Or did you recommend a restaurant, film or something else? And maybe you can send them a link with further information or how they could book.</p>
Deborah Carter	<p>Yes, and also we need to be mindful of the medium that you use to follow up and how quickly after the event you follow up and contact the person, and that's all really going to depend on the conversation that you've had. I generally find that a good idea is to follow up with an email or a message one or two days after the event to say how much you've enjoyed meeting</p>

	<p>that person and reminding them of your common interest or follow up on something that you were discussing. And again, depending on the event and the contact, it might also be appropriate to add them to your LinkedIn.</p> <p>If it is a prospective client, maybe stay in touch with personalised emails over time. Obviously, don't overload them with irrelevant information, but remind them that you are here and thank them for their time, even if the contact eventually doesn't lead to any new business or develop any further.</p> <p>And if it's a personal contact, I'd keep in regular touch and maybe arrange to meet for a drink or coffee. And a work colleague, that's the easiest one to follow-up with: pop your head around their door, say hi and extend the hand of help.</p>
<p>Tanja Velling</p>	<p>That's actually really nice and I think they would appreciate you coming around. But anyway, before we leave you, we just had a few last thoughts to also summaries and touch back on the things we discussed.</p> <p>So, networking is a skill that takes time and practice to develop and we practice this skill constantly – actually – in our daily lives, whilst we're not even necessarily conscious of it.</p> <p>Everyone, no matter how confident they appear will have attended an event at which they felt like a fish out of water. Prepare the things you can prepare such as your introduction and conversation starters.</p> <p>If you are new to networking in a professional landscape, work the room with a friend, maybe. There is safety in numbers! By that, I don't mean that you should stick together and walk around in a pair. I mean, go together so you enter the room with a friendly face, separate, join different groups and know that person is there if the mingling gets a little too much or you get stuck with nobody to speak to. And they could also help extract you from conversations.</p> <p>Overall, networking should be an enjoyable experience – not something to be dreaded. Relax, breathe, be in the present and often you will walk away from networking events having made contacts which will develop into clients or friends as time goes on.</p> <p>Do not be afraid to use appropriate humour either! Laughter is the best medicine after all.</p> <p>Remember to follow up. The first contact and conversation should be viewed as the beginning of an ongoing relationship.</p>
<p>Deborah Carter</p>	<p>And I think that's summed it up really well.</p>

	<p>We hope you've enjoyed listening to this podcast and some of the hints and tips are useful to think about when preparing for your next networking event.</p>
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