

3

Tools For Cultivating Connections

Chance favors those who are prepared. – Louis Pasteur

So, now that I've convinced you to get out there to make friends and exchange information, you need to outfit yourself with some essential tools. There are two that I strongly recommend you develop and use:

- An attractive business card with your contact information.
- A confident statement about your personal brand and your career transition when you introduce yourself.

BUSINESS CARD

You need to have a way to give someone your contact information and a positive first impression with your brand on it. A business card does that for you. When developing your business card, there are two main aspects to consider: what should be included on your card and how you should design it.

What Should Be On Your Card

Of course, you must include your name and contact information on your card.

I advise putting the main number where you prefer to be reached rather than every number you have. Let's face it, most people will only dial the first number anyway, and using only one number helps to cut down clutter on your card.

Let's talk about some optional elements you can include. One is the position or title that you use to identify yourself. For example, if you're a software developer, you can put that under your name. If you're a sales manager, you can use that and so forth.

Your street address is an optional element nowadays, and leaving it off can help save space on your card.

Some people like to add a personal branding statement, something like “Going above and beyond to deliver extraordinary results.”

Another element could be a concise list of your main areas of expertise or competencies, maybe as a bulleted list on the back of the card.

If you have a LinkedIn profile, I strongly suggest you add the URL to your card. This helps you to avoid foisting your resume on someone who might rather check out your background later. And speaking of resumes... Some job seekers who want to be easily found by recruiters will set up a website or use a webhosting service to post their resume online. If you opt to do this, be sure that URL is on your card, too.

Design Tips

Tip #1: Pick a design that is tasteful and not too busy. Using color is good, but don't do something garish like lime green or hot pink unless it matches you and your brand in some way. And if you decide to use an image or picture, think about what you're saying about yourself. If you're a computer programmer, don't put a beach scene on your card just because you like the beach.

Tip #2: When you design your card, leave some white space so you or the recipient can write on it... you know, in case they want to remember who it is they were going to refer you to.

Tip #3: Be sure that whatever side of your card has the white space also has a matte surface rather than a glossy surface. It's okay if one side is glossy and one side is matte. Though the shiny finish is eye appealing, it's difficult to write on a glossy surface.

Giving Out Business Cards

Don't automatically hand out your business card. Ideally, you want to wait to be asked for your card. However, it is perfectly acceptable to be more assertive and ask the other person if they'd like your card. Then when they say yes, ask for theirs.

In her book, *The Secrets of Savvy Networking*, Susan RoAne, points out that “The business card is exchanged as the follow-up to an exchange of words that establishes communication, support, and mutual interest – not self-interest.”

Business Card Overview...

- Include your name, your email and the primary phone where you wish to be contacted.
- A personal branding statement and/or short list of your main areas of expertise might be good too.
- Consider putting your resume or profile online somewhere and then use that web URL on your card.
- Be sure you pick a design that reflects your *professional* self, using color tastefully and leaving white space open so it can be written on. Oh, and don't forget the matte versus glossy rule.

Now you're ready to create a card that helps you network more effectively!

INTRODUCTION STATEMENT

Now it's time to look at the basic guidelines for developing a confident-sounding introduction of yourself, which includes your personal brand and a positive explanation of your career transition.

4 Main Components

Okay, let's say you're at a party or some sort of networking function, and someone you've just met asks, "What do you do?"

First Component: Use a good hook to grab attention. Make sure what you're saying about yourself is compelling. It's best to tell them what you're talented in and passionate about in a way that is unique but also accessible and understandable to the average person who is not in your industry. Try to avoid using industry-related jargon that won't mean anything to the listener.

I once worked with a client who said, "I want to find a job programming in Java, and I enjoy working on new and legacy systems." Well, I know, and maybe you know, that Java is the name of a software programming language. But to some it might conjure up an image of coffee or the island in Indonesia. And the part about legacy systems would confuse some people. Since not everyone will know what this means, he might say this instead: "I work behind the scenes in making computers do what we want them to do. My specialty is writing codes and commands using a computer language called Java. I love blending my knowledge of older technology with cutting-edge technology..."

Second Component: Make a reference to your career transition, putting a positive spin on it, of course. If this applies to you, don't say you've been “laid off” but, rather, say your “position was eliminated.” It's more positive than saying “laid off” and leads the person hearing it to think “business decision” rather than “I wonder what she did wrong?” Also, never gripe about your last employer or the status of your job search.

Third Component: Make a reference to your future. What are you interested in doing next? It might be specific like, “I'm looking for a job doing just what I was doing before,” or it might be broader like, “I'm exploring my options and looking into new things.”

My Java programming client would simply say, “I love blending my knowledge of older technology with cutting-edge technology, and I'm currently looking for a company which values that.”

Fourth Component: If it's appropriate, return the conversation back to the other person. This is where you might ask for specific help. You might say, “... so, if you can think of anyone you know in that industry, please let me know.”

Write It, Practice It

It's a good idea to write out your personal branding statement and, using the guidelines mentioned above, blend it with a short phrase or sentence describing your profession in a unique and compelling way. Remember to make it accessible to the average person who is not familiar with your industry. One way to think of it is to imagine how you'd tell your mother about what you do... so that she *understands* it.

Since you're in transition, go ahead and include a short, positive statement about your transition.

Finally, when you've pulled these components together and constructed your introduction statement, practice it with other job seekers. Try it out with your friends. You don't need to memorize it verbatim, but you should feel comfortable whenever the opportunity comes up for you to introduce yourself.

One More Thing To Keep In Mind

The main reason why you won't memorize it verbatim is because your introduction statement will change according to your environment, the context in which you're using it and who you're meeting.

Sometimes it's not appropriate to ask for help. Sometimes it's better to be offered help instead. Sometimes your introduction statement will be short and sweet, and other times it's best to go into detail.

There will definitely be times when you'll only state your unique talent because you're talking to others who do exactly what you do and so you don't need to make it as compelling or as easy to understand.

"I'm a java programmer who loves blending my knowledge of older technology with cutting-edge technology, and I'm currently looking for a company which values that." This might be all that my client needs to say to other java programmers.

Your introduction statement is a living breathing thing that will change according to your needs, and you'll very likely continue to tweak it here and there as you use it again and again.

Okay, so those are the secrets to developing a strong introduction statement. Get out there and use it to cultivate some great connections.



SUMMARY

Tactic #3 – Create Introduction Statement & Business Card (Tools For Cultivating Connections)

There are two essential tools you need:

- An attractive business card with your contact information.
- A confident statement about your personal brand and your career transition when you introduce yourself.

Determine what you will have on your business card. Some elements are essential, such as your name, email address and phone number. Some elements are optional, such as your position or title, your street address, a branding statement or the URL for your LinkedIn profile.

Design the card to reflect your professional self. Pick an attractive color and design layout that's not too busy and that leaves room somewhere on the card for recipients to write on it.

Develop a confident-sounding introduction statement. Include your personal brand. Start with a good hook to grab attention. Make a positive reference to your career transition and then refer to your future focus. Write it out and practice it.



Job Search Tactics That Work

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