

## **THE FOUR MOST COMMON NETWORKING MISTAKES**

*By Greg Hicks*

Take a tip from Miss Manners: Etiquette is important. And perhaps nowhere more so than at networking events.

You may already know that networking events are one of the best ways to find business leads and expand your contacts. But attending events is only half the battle. You also need to know how to behave at them. If you talk too much, say too little or arrive unprepared, you can ruin your chances to leave with a business lead or opportunity.

### **THIS AIN'T JUST A PARTY**

Remember why you're there. The purpose of a networking event is to help you advance professionally. It's a social event -- but a professional one. Think of it as a conference social or a business dinner. The cardinal rule of networking events: Never drink too much. We all remember what happened to Melanie Griffith in "Working Girl."

You want the people you meet to remember you as capable, competent and polished -- not as the man or woman donning a lampshade on their head at the end of the evening. Dress appropriately. Err on the side of conservative and choose an outfit you could wear to a job interview. Your attire should say, "I'm a professional," not "I'm a party animal."

### **DO YOUR HOMEWORK**

Don't arrive at a networking event without a plan of attack. Make a list of people that you specifically want to see there and if there will be speakers, presenters or any special guests in attendance. Do a little research on each of them. A little knowledge goes a long way. If you know something about the people you approach, it's much easier to start a conversation -- and keep it going. For those who have been coming to OSIP for years, this will be easy!

### **PITCH IN**

Don't forget to prepare your elevator pitch, which we practice every year at OSIP! You'll need it to introduce yourself to people at the event. An elevator pitch is brief -- brief enough to share during an elevator ride. In your pitch, give a one-minute summary of who you are, your experience, and abilities. Practice your pitch before the networking event so that it'll sound natural. Be confident, but not pushy. Remember, a networking event isn't a formal interview. Don't forget to smile and give a firm, meaningful handshake.

### **QUALITY, NOT QUANTITY**

Focus on the quality, not quantity, of your connections at the networking event. You'll get better results by making a few good connections than by handing out dozens of business cards indiscriminately. And first impressions matter, so mind your manners. Always stay focused on the person you are talking to and maintain eye contact. Don't scan the room trying to decide whom you'll talk to next. Also, show interest in the people you meet. You can make a great impression by asking a few thoughtful questions. Above all, be genuine and sincere. A strong professional network is based on relationships, and it takes time to build a relationship.