

Being prepared opens doors at conferences

By [Gill South](#)

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Richard Manthel,
managing director of
recruitment consultancy
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Every profession has its annual conference, a knees-up where the great and the good mix, discuss issues facing the industry and give the latest stars a platform to strut their stuff.

For those who think they have got what it takes, industry conferences can be a real opportunity for them to shine and pave the way for the next fabulous job offer.

Of course, these meetings can also be a complete waste of time, occasions where people choose to spend the time with their mates, make no new contacts and forget about it as soon as they leave.

It's all in the way you approach it. The clever ones who do their research before they go, usually end up with the last laugh. Superficially "doing" the conference, is a waste of time and energy. Collecting business cards for the sake of it, is not an achievement in itself unless you can remember what you talked about with them.

Then when you go to make contact again after the conference, you can continue the dialogue, says executive coach, Christian Dahmen.

Some preparation before the event will be incredibly useful. "If you are wanting to leverage off the conference, then it is very important to know what you are trying to achieve and plan accordingly," says Richard Manthel, NZ managing director of recruitment consultancy Robert Walters.

Business relationships are critical in today's world, he says. "Good networkers will know who is going to the conference in advance and identify who they would like to meet or build relationships. Conference lists are usually available in advance," says Manthel.

The Trans Tasman Business Circle promotes itself as a networking organisations and will give lists out before and during the event so you can maximise the opportunity, he says.

If you are important enough to be talking at the conference, Iain McCormick, managing director of the Executive Coaching Centre, has a few tips. The time you speak is critically important, he says.

There are two options. If you are a confident speaker, try to speak as early on as possible, advises McCormick. A good speech a few hours into the conference can create a real impression and set the tone for a buzzing conference.

"The first few speakers are always very influential," says McCormick. "They are opinion leaders."

At all costs try to avoid the after lunch slot because people's energy levels and concentration are at a low ebb. McCormick suggests breaking people up into interactive groups and waking them up a bit is a good idea.

And it never does any harm to go up to a successful speaker afterwards and tell them you enjoyed their talk. "It makes me feel good and I remember them," says the coach.

If you are not a confident speaker, McCormick advises sitting quietly until close to the end of the session, before making your point. "Try to summarise what's happened before and state your case. First of all you will be able to speak with authority because you are summarising what's happened and you can create empathy with the people who are there."

The executive coach, who says he always gets work from speaking at conferences, believes a successful networker can always benefit from such an occasion.

There are ways of making sure you use the good ideas generated by the conference, adds Dahmen. He suggests that you and two new contacts agree to apply an idea, "put the insights into action" and keep in touch about your progress.

A fruitful new friendship has to be treated with discipline, says Dahmen.

If you do make a good contact, one of the challenges is to then go away from people that you "fall in love with" and continue networking, he says.

Conferences are the time to cold call people. "Actively get in touch with people that you don't know," he says.

These events are not cheap and can cost as much as \$2000 for two days, so don't waste them or you'll never be sent to one again. "You have to face these cold wars which exist within yourself. Only if you do that, can you leverage conferences for your own career," says Dahmen.

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