

Holiday Networking, Santa-Style

By Diana Ratliff

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Diana Ratliff
diana@businesscarddesign.com

Business Card Secrets <http://www.businesscarddesign.com>

It's that special time of year again. Odds are that very soon you'll be mingling with people you barely know (or know all-too-well) at some sort of holiday get-together. Whether you're attending out of courtesy, tradition, or business desperation (it's been a tough year for many) doesn't matter. What DOES matter is that you understand how holiday networking differs from the networking you'll be doing in January.

Holiday networking is less aggressive, slower-paced and more subtle. Think "market research" instead of "close the deal" and you'll have the right mindset. Yes, making connections that lead to sales is still a primary reason for attending social functions, but around the holidays it's less obvious. The social "dance" is longer.

So when preparing for your holiday party "performance," practice the role of Santa instead of Scrooge, and you'll do just fine.

How would Santa act at that lavish bash in your office building next week?

First, remember that Santa is friendly and approachable to EVERYONE. He's not a snob or someone who's solely focused on influential, powerful people. You'd do well to adopt that attitude yourself. You'll enjoy yourself more, feel less stressed, and who knows? You may meet someone with unexpected influence or connections.

If you're one of the many people who'd rather have teeth pulled than talk to strangers, rehearse a few "safe" opening lines. "So how do you know (the host/hostess)?" or "Don't I know you from somewhere?" are non-threatening ways to begin a conversation, with the added benefit of allowing you to look for connections. And "How has your day been?" is much more likely to initiate small-talk than the usual "How are you?" ("Fine, thanks.") exchange.

Second, Santa is a great listener who's really focused on other people's wants and needs and not his own. He invites confidences and listens more than he speaks. Can you imagine Santa thrusting his business card on someone he's barely met? (I DO have one of his cards, by the way. See it [here](#).)

So ask a lot of "who, what, where, when and why" questions. Try to spend the first five minutes of any conversation talking about the other person. You already know about yourself; you want to gather information and make friends with others. Besides, it's very flattering. Someone who's interested in others is invariably seen as someone worth knowing. (So tuck a few business cards in

your pocket beforehand!)

Finally, Santa is welcome and appreciated at any gathering because he brings gifts. No, you don't need to carry in a large red bag filled with personalized company pens or magnets. But before the party, think about who you're likely to meet and what you can offer them.

Have you read a great book? Do you know what's being built across the street? Did you discover a helpful new product or service? Then don't be a Scrooge! Spread the news. Offer the information.

Better yet, do you have a personal connection to someone party attendees would like to meet? Then be prepared to offer their name and/or business card.

And when talk does turn to business, keep it light and keep it brief. If you have helpful ideas to pass on, or discover a connection you'd like to strengthen, ask for a business card and permission to call at work. Then steer the conversation back to more fun, personal topics. (Just remember to follow up afterwards!)

With preparation, you can enjoy meeting new people and reconnecting with old colleagues in mutually profitable ways. And you might just become as popular as Ol' Saint Nick.

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Business card expert Diana Ratliff specializes in helping you be favorably remembered by important prospects. Shouldn't your business card work as hard as YOU do? Get her ebook and subscribe to her FREE ezine at <http://www.businesscarddesign.com>

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