



HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF A CONFERENCE

CONFERENCES 101

Maybe you've been to conferences before, or maybe you are a first-timer; either way, I have assembled this **guide** to prepare everyone at Gould Evans to be conference aficionados. These 'dos-and-don'ts' will help you **be professional, stand out, network, and make the most of your conference experience**. Happy conferencing!

-Julie Nelson Meers

5 STUDIOS
5 CITIES



INTRODUCTIONS:

The best way to prepare to meet new people is to have your introduction already planned out ahead of time. Introductions should not feel like improv; rather, they ought to be reflexive.

Here's what to do:

1. Write out a few variations of your introduction and have them at the ready.

example: "My name is Laine, and I work with Gould Evans, an architectural firm. We study ways in which the design of learning spaces can better facilitate workplace readiness for today's children."

2. Specify for each audience – Keep the same basic framework, but insert an aspect of what the firm does based on your audience. If the conference is about UDL, then add, "We study ways in which UDL can be supported by learning space design."

example: My name is Julie, and I work with Gould Evans, an architecture and planning firm. I am here to help our teams share our thinking on some of the most important issues facing our communities.

NAME TAGS:

Wear your name tag on the **right**.

But why?

This feels counter-intuitive, but when you shake someone's hand, you want their eyes to be able to follow your extended arm up to your name tag.





BUSINESS CARDS:

There are a few things you need to remember about business cards:

1. **Carry plenty of them!** – Come to every conference with copious amounts of business cards because they are the most efficient way to exchange information
2. **Carry your cards behind your badge** – Your badge is an easy place to always have your cards at the ready, and it will help you remember to bring your cards each day since you always need your badge.
3. **Collect other business cards in a separate place** – You do not want to confuse the cards you receive from others with your own, and you do not want to lose the cards you have acquired.

SHARING CONTACT INFO:

Besides exchanging business cards, there are a few other ways you can share your information.

Phone Contact – Create a separate professional contact in your phone without all of the notes and personal information. This will help you readily text or email the people you meet.

LinkedIn QR Code – Open LinkedIn, and touch the QR code on the right side of the search bar. Then one person scans the other person's QR code. Simple and quick!



sample QR code



What attracts people most, it would appear, is other people.

—WILLAM H. WHYTE, *American Urbanist & Frontrunner of Placemaking Ideals*

HELP YOURSELF BY HELPING THE PEOPLE YOU MEET:

Go to conferences with the mindset of meeting the most interesting people there. Here are the main tips to remember.

1. **Ask questions** – Try to uncover these three main questions from each person you meet.

What are they up to?

What are they interested in?

What do they value?

2. **Listen** – Use a **2:1 ratio** of listening to speaking. A funny thing happens when you do this. They end up finding you fascinating, even though you are trying to learn about them.

3. **Find a helpful action** – As you are listening, look for ways to help them either **at the conference** (introduce them to someone else you just met) **or later** (send them something that evening or once you get home that might be interesting or helpful to them). Make this effort a true gesture of goodwill and not an attempt at selling something.

4. **Have a consistent reply** – When they ask you what you are up to at the conference, reply with, “I’m here to meet people who have the most interesting ideas about [the future of education].”

USE A 2:1 RATIO OF LISTENING TO SPEAKING.



USE YOUR SURROUNDINGS TO START A CONVERSATION:

Don't approach people cold at a conference. It feels too sales-y. Instead, use your surroundings to strike up a natural conversation.

For instance, **strike up a conversation with the person next** to you when you get to a session five minutes early and sit down, when you join a partially full table, or when you find yourself in a line. These instances will give you a few minutes to visit.

Instead of: "What do you do?"

Ask: "Have you worked on anything exciting recently?"

Instead of: "How are you?"

Ask: "What are you looking forward to the rest of the day?"



Here are some easy questions:

Lunch table – Are you enjoying the conference so far? Which have been your favorite breakouts/speakers?

Coffee line – Is this your first time attending this conference?

Bathroom line – How are you liking today's sessions? Which have been your favorites? Why?

Seatmate – What brings you to this session? Have you attended this conference before?

Badge line – Have you attended this conference before? Any tips for making the most of it?

Elevator/escalator – What was your favorite part of the day?

Others –

- What did you think of the keynote?
- Have you learned anything really interesting so far?
- Which break-out session are you going to next?
- Any booths I should stop by in the Exhibition Hall?
- Who is the most interesting person you have met so far?
- Did the speaker's message resonate with work you or your company are doing?

genuine compliment + follow-up item + handshake = lasting impression

EXITING THE CONVERSATION:

In order to properly create a lasting impression when leaving a conversation, **be honest and direct**, and follow the **exit formula**.

GENUINE COMPLIMENT + FOLLOW-UP

Here are some examples of how to leave a compliment while simultaneously addressing how you plan to follow up later.

"It's been a pleasure talking to you. I'll be sure to follow-up."

"I've loved hearing about your business idea. I'd love to keep in touch to hear how it goes. Here's my card."

"I'm going for a drink refill—it's been a pleasure! Hope to see you at the reception this evening."

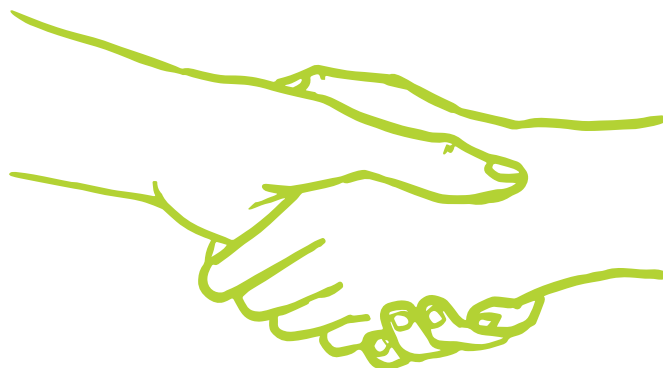
"I'm going to say hello to one of the panelists. Great speaking to you! Let's stay in touch."

"I've really enjoyed our conversation! I've also promised myself I would meet at least 3 people today, so I'm going to make the rounds—wish me luck. I hope to see you again tomorrow morning."

"This has been really interesting. Thanks for sharing your story. I would love your business card for the future, and I'll send you a link to that article."

HANDSHAKE

Smile, offer your hand, and give a nice send-off with well wishes. Say something along the lines of, "Good luck today" or "Safe travels."



CREATE SITUATIONS WHERE YOU ARE AT YOUR BEST:

Conferences can be draining due to the plethora of events during the mornings, afternoons, and evenings. It may be tempting to try to partake in a session or event during every opportunity in the day; however, this tactic will only wear you out and not set you up for success.

Instead, attend opportunities and set up meetings during the time of day where you are most relaxed and comfortable.

The morning person – If you are a morning person or love one-on-one, then get to the conference early and set up coffees with people you want to meet. Do not bother with the evening events. Save your energy, and be fresh the next morning.

The afternoon person – If you love a crowd or are better in the evenings, attend the after-parties and receptions. Skip the breakfast or even the first session so that you have more energy for end of the day.

PRE-NETWORKING:

Before even attending a conference, you should do some prep work in these two realms.

1. **Plan who you want to meet** – Make a list of people you want to meet for the first time and also of the people you want to reconnect with. Use email or social media to reach out to people the week before the conference. Let them know you will also be attending and are excited to meet/see them—bonus points for reaching out to speakers, VIPs, or special attendees you would like to connect with. Once you are at the conference, look for them, and introduce yourself, ideally in a setting where you have 3-5 minutes of their time. Look for reasons to follow up.

2. **Catch up on industry news** – Know about the big issues that are happening within the topic of the conference. It is an opportunity to connect experiences in the sessions with real life stuff.



WORKING THE ROOM:

If you go to a conference with someone you know, **agree to experience the conference separately** for most of the day so that you can each focus on meeting people. You are less likely to be approached when you are with someone, and it makes it that much harder to break out of your comfort zone to meet someone new.

When you find yourself in a room full of people, the **best place to stand is just to the left or right and slightly away from the bar**. Once people have their drink and have turned to dive into the crowd, you may be the first friendly person they see. **Tip:** Do not try this with the buffet table—it is hard to talk with your mouth full.

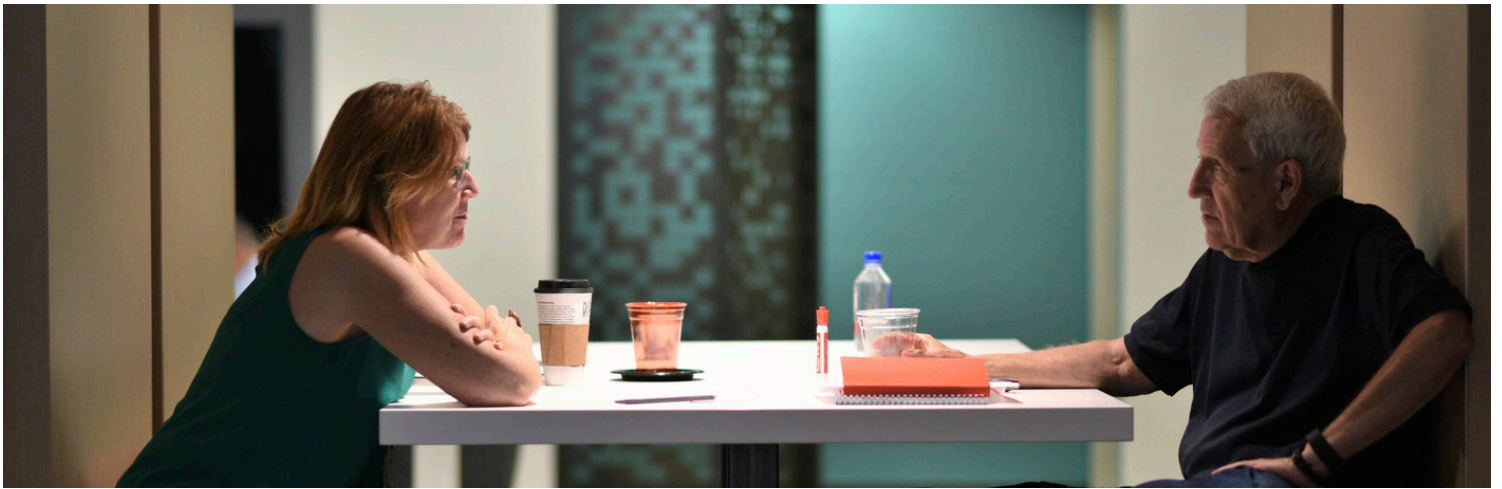
DURING A SESSION:

If you are a social media native, get active during the conference, and of course, always include the event hashtag as well as the Gould Evans hashtag.

Immediately following a session, go on social media to **post photos** of the session, **write thank yous** for the speakers, or **share** a single compelling phrase or line that stood out to you from a session.

#GOULDEVANS





POST-NETWORKING:

Congratulations! You finished the conference; however, your work is not done once the conference ends. You need to follow-up with the people you met with these steps:

1. **Make notes on business cards** – After you receive a business card from someone, be sure to set aside time that day to record topics of conversation or reasons to follow-up. You will meet a ton of people during conferences, so you need to document what you talked about because otherwise, you will surely forget. It is easiest to do it on their business card because all of their contact information is already there for later.
2. **Connect on LinkedIn** – You may find you want to circle back to talk more based on their background. Ask to connect with them on LinkedIn only after you have had a good conversation. Do not be that person who tries to Link with everyone just because they are attending the same conference.
3. **Set aside time the day after the conference** – Set aside time the day you return from the conference—block it on your calendar in advance—to follow up with those you want to stay connected with.
4. **Connect again a month later** – Mark your calendar a month out as a reminder to follow up with them again. Use the follow-up to say hi, remark about something you discussed, or share how the conference is impacting your work. Look for ways to keep the relationship going. If they are local, suggest getting together or introducing them to someone in the studio. If in another city, think about opportunities for introducing them to someone from one of our other studios. And of course, use social media to stay connected, especially if they are not local.

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