

# Networking for Introverts: The Terrifying Mistake That Created More Freelance Leads

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April 29, 2018



I knew I had to figure out the marketing piece if I hoped to be a successful freelancer, but networking for introverts and self-promotion isn't exactly my favorite thing to do.

Before throwing myself into a crowd of people to drum up business, I thought I'd take a "class" at a local community college on networking to learn how it's done.

There was just one problem.

The "class" turned out to be a roomful of professionals who all seemed to know each other... well. When I walked in, my mind started spinning and my heart pounding. "If I could just find a seat..."

Finally I did, and that's when the director looked straight at me: "Stand up and tell us who you are and what your business is...."

"Who, me?" I thought. Cue the sweaty palms, queasy stomach, noodle legs, hands trembling with fear, and an intense desire to pull a bag over my head.

If you're a fellow introvert and freelance writer, what would you do? Here's what happened next:

## Networking for introverts doesn't have to be scary

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For a few seconds, I was terrified. And then something happened.

I heard myself say, “Hi, I’m Julie. I’m a freelance writer.” Spellbinding intro, no?

Just so happens I’d stumbled into a local networking group, a trip-up that made me feel like I’d climbed to the highest cliff imaginable for an introvert and jumped.

But the truth is my accidental introduction to in-person networking was one of the first big wins for my freelance business. It resulted in three monumental shifts that transformed my idea about networking for introverts.

Here’s how to turn in-person networking for introverts into a positive lead-generating experience:

### 1. Change your mind about in-person networking

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The workshop presenter challenged attendees to meet just one or two people that day. I don’t know about you, but a roomful of strangers sends me ducking for cover.

One or two, though? Not so much. And that’s the switch that flipped for me.

Instead of thinking about all the new faces I might see at a given event, I started expecting to meet just one or two people.

The result? I’ve actually met far more than that, but it’s been way more comfortable than I ever thought it could be.

**Do this:** If thinking about in-person networking sends your heart racing like mine did or overwhelms you with fear, stop and ask yourself: Can I meet and introduce myself to just one person? Of course you can.

### 2. Let go of perfectionism

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On that first day, I was completely unprepared for a networking event because I thought I’d be sitting in class. I hadn’t given any thought to describing my work or my ideal client.

In fact, my first elevator speech was the spellbinding intro mentioned earlier: “Hi, I’m Julie. I’m a freelance writer.” So far from perfect it barely qualifies as an elevator speech.

Did the leader ask me to leave and never come back because of it? No. Actually, business owners introduced themselves and asked for my card. Normal networking stuff.

Do you have to have an elevator speech? Yes. Does it have to be perfect the first time you use it? No.

**Do this:** If you've filled your recycling bin with loads of scrapped pitches you're too afraid to try, don't give up. Start with your name, call yourself a writer, and give a brief statement about the kind of writing you do or the kind of clients you hope to meet. That's it. Then try it out on the one person you introduce yourself to.

### 3. Ask lots of questions

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The old adage that people like to talk about themselves is handy, and I asked a ton of questions that morning to try and take advantage of this human tendency. Before it was over, I'd learned how the networking group works and who participates in it.

Eventually I got around to giving answers, too. But that morning taught me that being prepared to ask questions effectively shifts my focus toward others and away from my own fears.

**Do this:** If the thought of small talk with strangers makes you break into a cold sweat, relax. You can prepare for these gigs ahead of time by concentrating on what you want to learn.

Good questions that get people talking are things like the proverbial:

- Tell me about your business
- What do you do?
- Who's your ideal client?
- Who would be the best referrals to send your way?

These simple shifts of perspective turned events on the calendar like "Leads" and "Business Women's Networking" into some of my favorite activities to grow my freelance business. And as an introvert, I have to say that's something I never saw coming.

### Show up and introduce yourself

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Don't wait to fall into in-person networking accidentally like I did. Face your fears head-on, and jump-start your marketing efforts.

All you have to do is show up at a local networking event with the goal of introducing yourself to just one person. Come prepared with a simple elevator speech. Ask lots of questions to learn about others. If you can make these shifts, too, you'll realize there networking for introverts doesn't have to be scary.