

Skills 360 – Getting the Most out of a Conference (Part 1)

Discussion Questions

1. How do you usually prepare for a conference?
2. Do you find it easy to talk to new people at a conference? Why or why not?
3. At a conference, how do you decide which sessions or workshops to attend?

Vocabulary

To get the most out of something: to use or enjoy something as much or as effectively as possible; “You should really do all the assignments if you want to get the most out of the course.”

Hyperconnected: using the Internet and mobile devices widely or frequently; “In this hyperconnected world, many employees feel they have to answer email outside of their regular work hours.”

Face time: time spent with a person, as opposed to communicating on the phone or online; “Although phone and email are useful, I find that nothing is better than face time for building relationships with clients.”

Venue: the place or location of an activity or event; “We’ve decided to use the City Art Gallery as the venue for our big product launch.”

Action: the exciting activity or events that happen in a place; “I enjoy living downtown because that’s where all the action is, both in business and in night life.”

Spontaneously: without planning; “Some of my best marketing ideas come to me spontaneously while riding the bus or walking.”

To capitalize on something: to use an event or situation to gain an advantage; “Business networking events are great if you actually capitalize on the opportunity by talking to different people.”

Lineup: a list of people who will perform or present at an event; “I’ve had a look at the lineup of presenters at the conference and there are some pretty big names coming.”

To pack something: to fill something; “Jack Welch is such a well-known speaker I’m sure we can pack the concert hall for his talk.”

Tête-à-tête: a private conversation; "Listen Jack, if you've got time later I'd love it if you could come by my office for a little tête-à-tête."

Prospect: a potential customer; "I came out of that trade fair with a big list of great prospects who really seemed interested in our products."

To duck out of something: to leave a place or event quietly or without being noticed; "I'll be at this afternoon's meeting Sofi, but I'll have to duck out around 3:00."

Madly: in a wild, excited, or intense way; "With only 20 minutes left before the presentation, Bonnie was madly trying to get all the information packages printed."

To carve out time: to create or find time for something; "I know you're busy Carlos, but it's so important to carve out time each day for exercise or relaxation."

To inundate: to send or give too much of something; "Since the newspaper ran a profile on our company, our receptionist has been inundated with calls about our services."

To race around: to move very quickly; "I don't know where Jose gets his energy. He's always racing around getting twice as much done as anyone else."

Dos: suggestions about what you should do in a situation; "In my first chat with clients, I like to give them a brief list of dos when it comes to personal investing."

Don'ts: suggestions about what you should not do in a situation; "With 20 years of experience, I can share some important 'don'ts' for new salespeople."

Shy: nervous, quiet, or embarrassed in social situations; "Paul has really transformed from a shy and awkward young college grad into a confident and outgoing salesman."

To break the ice: to do or say things that make people feel more comfortable in social situations; "At the beginning of the session, the facilitator had us walk around and talk to each other participant just to break the ice."

Personable: friendly and easy to get along with; "Listen, if you're having difficulty, just ask Verne for help. He's easily the most personable guy in the office."

Mutual acquaintance: someone both you and another person know; "So Ivan, it turns out we have a mutual acquaintance: you know Hal Fuller, don't you?"

To absorb: to learn, understand, or take in new information or ideas; "Even though the speaker was engaging, I still find it hard to absorb so much information at once."

To stand out: to be noticeable because you are different or better than others; "The job interview is your chance to say something meaningful to stand out from all the other applicants."

Pub: an informal place for drinking alcohol; "Every Friday after work a bunch of us head to the pub just down the street from the office for a drink."

To overdo it: to do too much of something; "You want to apply some pressure to close the sale, but if you overdo it the customer might be turned off."

Close to the action: near the excitement or activity of an event or place; "I'm willing to pay extra for a hotel that's close to the action at the Consumer Electronics Show."

To scramble: to hurry or try hard to get something; "I totally forgot I need to present at the staff meeting, so I'm scrambling to put something together."

Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host Tim Simmons, and today I want to talk about how to [get the most out of](#) a conference.

The digital age has changed the way we communicate and build relationships. And while it's great to be able to connect with someone on the other side of the world by email, phone, or chat apps, face to face contact is certainly not dead. In fact, in this [hyperconnected](#) world, face to face contact is even *more* valuable, and one of the best opportunities for [face time](#) is at a conference.

Getting the most out of a conference begins *before* the conference, when you plan your trip. In many cases, you'll have the option to stay at the conference [venue](#). If so, it's worth it. And if not, then stay as close as possible. You don't want to miss out on any [action](#) because you're spending time getting to and from the conference. And there's lots of informal networking opportunities that can happen [spontaneously](#) around the conference location. You want to be able to [capitalize on](#) those opportunities as much as possible.

Conference preparation also means having an early look at the agenda or [lineup](#) of talks and deciding which ones you want to attend. You might choose based on the topic, or because you want to meet the presenter. But don't [pack](#) your schedule. Leave some time open for [a tete a tete](#) with a [prospect](#) or a potential partner.

Now, you've probably seen people at conferences [ducking out of](#) presentations to take phone calls or [madly](#) sending emails during breaks? Don't let that be you. If at all possible, [carve time out](#) of your schedule to be truly present at the conference. Let colleagues know you'll be busy so they don't [inundate](#) you with email.

You've probably also seen people [racing around](#) trying to locate a phone charger, or apologizing because they don't have any business cards on them. These are definitely things to avoid. Come prepared. Make sure you have all the tech and business cards you might need.

So, imagine you've done all you should to prepare and you show up on the first day at the registration table. You get your name tag and your conference package and... now what? Well, I'd like to share some "dos" with you today. And in our next lesson I'll go over some important "don'ts."

What kind of "dos" am I talking about? Well, my number one suggestion is to get out and meet people. If *all* you want is information or learning, then you can do that online, or in a class. A conference is one of the absolute best networking opportunities around. So don't be [shy](#). Be the first to [break the ice](#). Other people will appreciate it. That conference room is full of potential customers and collaborators. Go find them. Be [personable](#). And in every conversation try to establish a personal connection or something in common. That might mean a place, an interest, a [mutual acquaintance](#), or an opinion on one of the speakers.

Speaking of speakers, it's a great idea to use the topics of their talk or workshop as a starting point for a conversation. And one thing you should do that will help you **absorb** and process what you learn is to take notes. Don't assume you'll remember everything you hear. Taking notes will also help you ask good questions at the end of a talk or presentation. That's one way you can **stand out**, make an impression on people, and build a connection with the presenter.

Asking questions is part of a more general bit of advice: participate! That doesn't just mean in workshops or sessions. You should also be engaged via social media, by posting on the event's website as well as your own. It also means getting involved in social activities after hours. A lot of great business is conducted, and relationships built, at the **pub**.

But, let me give you one don't in advance of our next lesson: don't **overdo it** at the pub, especially early in the conference. If you have so much fun that you miss half the next day, you're wasting an opportunity.

Okay, I've talked about the importance of good preparation, staying **close to the action**, and making sure you have everything you need so you're not **scrambling** during the event. I've also given you some advice for during the event, especially around networking, taking notes, and participating in everything the conference has to offer. Tune in next time and I'll cover some things to avoid, and talk about some important conference follow-up activities.

That's all for today. If you'd like to test yourself on what we've just covered, have a look at the **BusinessEnglishPod.com** website. There you'll find a quiz about today's show as well as a complete transcript.

So long. And see you again soon.

Review

1. What should you do in order to take advantage of the informal networking opportunities in and around the conference venue?
 - A Register well ahead of time.
 - B Stay at or near the conference venue.
 - C Bring more than enough business cards.
 - D Choose sessions ahead of time.

2. It's a good idea to decide which sessions to attend ahead of time, but don't...
 - A ... choose based only on topic.
 - B ... tell others what you will attend.
 - C ... completely fill your schedule.
 - D ... attend the same sessions as colleagues.

3. Which of the following are important aspects of conference preparation?
 - A Changing your phone message.
 - B Packing a phone charger.
 - C Printing new business cards.
 - D Sending a lot of emails.
 - E Letting people know you'll be busy.
 - F Ensuring you have lots of business cards.

4. The number one thing you should do at a conference is...
 - A ... choose popular sessions.
 - B ... meet new people.
 - C ... take good notes.
 - D ... move around quickly.

5. In every conversation, you should try to _____.
 - A ... share your opinion about the conference.
 - B ... write down what people say.
 - C ... establish a personal connection.
 - D ... ask about good presenters.

6. Which of the following are things you should do during a conference?
 - A ... get involved in social activities.
 - B ... take notes to help you remember.
 - C ... skip a day to conserve energy.
 - D ... ask good questions to the presenters.
 - E ... stay in close touch with your office by phone.
 - F ... avoid social media.
 - G ... talk with others about the sessions and workshops.
 - H ... avoid breaking the ice.

Review Answers

1. What should you do in order to take advantage of the informal networking opportunities in and around the conference venue?
B Stay at or near the conference venue.
2. It's a good idea to decide which sessions to attend ahead of time, but don't...
C ... completely fill your schedule.
3. Which of the following are important aspects of conference preparation? [choose all that apply]
B Packing a phone charger.
E Letting people know you'll be busy.
F Ensuring you have lots of business cards.
4. The number one thing you should do at a conference is...
B ... meet new people.
5. In every conversation, you should try to _____.
C ... establish a personal connection.
6. Which of the following are things you should do during a conference? [choose all that apply]
A ... get involved in social activities.
B ... take notes to help you remember.
D ... ask good questions to the presenters.
G ... talk with others about the sessions and workshops.