

Networking or Working the Room. **by Robena Grant**

Working the room, schmoozing, power lunches, networking breakfasts, they all sound like fun don't they? Not as a rule to the introverted writer. Most of us are more comfortable sitting at our computers conversing with our imaginary friends ... the characters in our latest project. Why is it that we dread these events, or putting ourselves in the spotlight? With RWA National Conference fast approaching we need to take a look at our plan of action. In an event as large as this one, how do we find the people we'd like to meet, how do we approach them when we do find ourselves in the same room, and what do we say when we get in front of them?

****Key**** Dale Carnegie said, "You can close more business in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get people interested in you."

Here is a quick way to brush up on the basics of networking:

1. Your game plan:

*What would you like to achieve? What are your objectives? Do you want simply to shake the hand of the keynote speaker? Tell an author you love her work? Grab a moment to tell an agent or editor you'd love to work with them? Or are you promoting your latest novel?

*Practice your elevator pitch. Describe who you are and what you do in 30 seconds.

*Identify a few people who you'd like to meet in advance of the conference. Attend events like the Literacy Book signing where authors would love your attention, especially the newly published authors who don't yet have a huge fan base. Go to the publisher's Spotlights to meet editors. Attend the luncheons and other scheduled events and sit with strangers.

*Make or order new business cards and remember to take them with you.

*Volunteer. You never know who you'll meet or be able to help.

2. Schmooze:

*The event has arrived. You're looking your best. You've practiced your pitch in front of the mirror. Don't sit in a corner or stay in your room. Go to events and mix and mingle.

*Wear your nametag. Introduce yourself and offer an effective handshake, nothing limp, nothing bone-crushing either. Offer your business card and if it seems appropriate ask for theirs and always keep a few of yours very handy, in a jacket pocket, or in the inside pocket of your purse (you'll probably be balancing a drink or a plate of food.)

*Start a conversation with small talk. Your goal is to create a personal connection. Don't fly into a pitch of you and what you are writing. Get to know the other person.

*Don't stay in one place too long. Excuse yourself and keep mingling. If there is a connection made you can always meet up again later.

3. Follow Up:

*Write notes on the back of business cards you collect. When you get home you'll have small reminders to recall who these people are and something personal about them to jog your memory of the conversation.

*Follow up. Even if just to say it was a pleasure to meet you. Keep it brief or make an offer to share information or help in any way.

*Give referrals wherever possible.

Remember that having an editor or agent appointment is only one aspect of Nationals and it is not the only way you can promote who you are and what you write.