



Rebecca Harrison is president of Network Ireland 2017, managing director of Fishers of Newtownmountkennedy Ltd and managing director of Food at Fishers cafe.

BY  
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# Building business relationships through networking and how to remove the dread!

Network Ireland president Rebecca Harrison, Managing Director of Fishers of Newtownmountkennedy department store, delivers a masterclass in mingling.

We've all been there – you walk into an event and it feels like everybody else knows each other. The chances of that actually being the case are very slim. Remember, everyone is there for the same reason. Sometimes you must just take a deep breath and say hi. **Inevitably they aren't as scary as you think!**

If you're very concerned, there are a few other tricks you can use to prepare yourself. You could ask the event organisers to introduce you to people – they want the event to be a success and would be delighted to assist.

## Repeat Your Name

When you're introducing yourself, always repeat your name, "My name is Rebecca. Rebecca Harrison." It sounds a bit 'James Bond', but it's a great way to be remembered. And it doesn't sound so strange when you actually do it! Likewise, it will be easier for you to remember their name if you repeat it when you're introduced. How many times have you chatted to someone for 10 minutes before realising you've completely forgotten their name?

If looking for things to say, an easy opener is to talk about the event's keynote speaker or ask whether the other person is enjoying the event, or discuss something current or even the weather. I'd recommend not launching into a prepared speech about what you do. It can be off-putting.

## Be human

One of the big things for me when it comes to networking is to be human. It's not about the quick sell and flashing business cards.

**It's a conversation**, so ask lots of open questions that will give you an insight into the other person's interests. **People buy from people and people buy repeatedly from people they like!** So, aren't you better to build a relationship that will endure rather than force a quick sale that may be the last?

I don't think anybody likes to be sold to at an event, so when you're chatting about work, touch on topics that are accessible. The more questions you ask, the easier it is to tailor your answers.

For example, I run a clothes business. If I was speaking to someone who told me they had an interest in fashion, I'd talk in more general terms about styles and colours that are in season. The point is to share insider tips with the other person and offer rough advice around their interests – not to blatantly push your product.

## Give

The old adage of Givers Get is so true with Networking. If you give something – advice, a referral, a connection etc, the other person is going to be delighted and remember you. Remember that the person you're speaking to may not be interested in your service or product but someone they know might be and vice versa. When you give, it always comes back to you in the end!

The other thing I often do when I'm networking is try and connect other people with colleagues. If I'm talking to someone who's never going to be interested in my business, I'd mention a friend who might be a bit more relevant.

I have a colleague in Network Ireland's Kildare branch who has an engineering company, so if I was speaking to the head of a construction firm, I'd mention her. When you share those contacts, the favour is usually returned.

There's never a one-size-fits-all approach to conversation topics. Someone from Kilkenny isn't guaranteed to be enthusiastic about hurling. The more questions you ask, the easier it will be to read your audience. Networking is at least 50% about listening. In fact I'd say it's more than 50%!

### Dread

I obviously attend a lot of networking events, but sometimes even I don't feel like going to them.

Especially if it's after a long day's work but the worst part is the thought of going. Inevitably once I'm there the buzz in the room is enough to make me glad I made the effort. When you're meeting with other entrepreneurs who are motivated and enthusiastic about what they do, that energy is infectious.

There's nothing wrong with bringing a friend with you for some moral support, or talking to someone you know already but make sure the two of you are not huddled in a corner. If you assume an open stance, make eye contact with other people and smile at them, you'll come across as more approachable.

You should always be polite and welcoming, even when you find yourself cornered by someone you'd prefer not to continue speaking to. It's really important to just be polite. Listen and then make your excuses or bring them with you to speak to someone else.

Of course, there are two sides to that scenario. Other people might not be interested in what you have to say. Don't take offence to that. If they're looking over their shoulders and not really listening, excuse yourself and move on.



### Congruence

My final tip comes from Barbara Moynihan of On Your Feet, a fantastic trainer in networking and public speaking. One of her big lessons is to be congruent. That means when you're talking, not only are you actually engaged in the conversation but that your facial expression should match what you're saying.

If you're talking about something sad and have a big grin on your face, then it doesn't hold true and will turn people off.

Barbara also recommends that if you want people to remember you, your clothes should be consistent with what you do. If you're nervous, actually highlight yourself a little bit more in what you wear. For example, one of our members is a photographer who specialises in portraits of animals. She's kind of arty and quirky. If she rocked up to an event wearing a suit it would look odd.

### About Network Ireland

Rebecca Harrison is president of Network Ireland, an organisation that supports women in business with branches throughout the country. Each branch organises monthly networking events with a keynote speaker or workshop around business themes. They offer support, development and motivation for women in business and offer an environment to grow and develop your business and

career and develop business and personal relationships with other members locally and across the network.

They run a Businesswomen of the Year awards programme each year and were delighted to partner with CPA Ireland Skillnet this year for the Awards. There are 6 categories - Emerging New Business, Established Small SME, Established Large SME, Employee, Arts and Social Enterprise. The awards programme will launch in February and regional winners announced in May. Each regional winner then competes for the National title in September.

Their Mentoring programme open to all members is also a major benefit. Offering a wide variety of peer to peer and experience based mentors, an opportunity that is something that all top business people attribute to their success.

You can find details of your nearest branch and upcoming events as well as their awards and mentorship programme on [www.networkireland.ie](http://www.networkireland.ie).