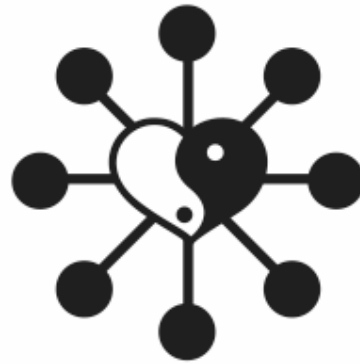


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SOCIAL
NETWORKING

How To Become a World-Class Social Maestro in Any City

Alex Benzer, MD, MPhil

The Tao of Social Networking

How to Build a World-Class Network and Become a Social
Maestro in Any City

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The Tao of Social Networking

One of the key secrets to success in life (especially your dating life) is to have a robust network of friends and associates. It's common sense: the more people you know, the more likely it is that you will have a meaningful interaction with one of those people, or that someone in your network will introduce you to a new person that interests you.

I've moved around a fair amount in my life so far, and one thing that my friends have noticed is how quickly I get to know a large number of people within a short time of moving to a new city. In fact, it seems that I know more people within *days* of my arrival in a new city than most of my friends who have lived there for *years*. "You seem to know everybody, Alex!," they remark, after I bump into 4-5 people I know over the course of an afternoon walk. Recently, I paid a visit to the city where I attended medical school. On the way to groceries with my friend Jeff (who has lived there for 12 years), I bumped into *three* people I knew, even though I hadn't been in that town for *seven years*. Jeff, on the other hand, didn't bump into anyone.

How does this work? And is this something that you can learn and use yourself? Absolutely. Granted, it certainly helps to have an outgoing personality. However, if you implement the following steps, you stand to get results leaps and bounds beyond what you have been getting so far, regardless of how introverted or extroverted you are. The following protocol works especially well if you've just landed in a brand-new city,

knowing hardly anyone at all. It works just as well if you've lived someplace for a little while – you just have to pretend like you're a newcomer and implement the same steps.

How to turn into a social maestro

If you do this right, you are likely to turn into a social maestro of your town. People who don't know you will know about you, and you are bound to bump into multitudes of people who know you wherever you go. This gives you what Robert Cialdini calls *social proof*, which is an indicator of high status. In *The Tao of Dating*, we've already explained how high status triggers attraction, so I'll just refer you back to that discussion.

The importance of an open, interested attitude

Before you start on the four steps below, it's important to internalize the key determinant of your social success: *an attitude of openness and interest*. People tend to find interested people interesting. That is, if you show genuine interest in the people you meet, they tend to reciprocate by showing genuine interest in you. Also, an attitude of openness generally works better than one of "I wonder what I can get out of this person." Much better just to be curious and open about each new person that you meet, and perhaps wonder how well you can fit in each others' lives. Recall the Tao of Dating attitude of *how can I serve* (vs. *what's in it for me*), and you'll do just fine.

The four steps

Now that you have the right attitude in place, implementation of the following four easy steps will get you moving in the right direction.

Step 1: Honor all invitations.

An invitation is an act of humility. Someone has opened his/her doors and heart to you and considered you worthy enough to be a guest. Honor that. An invitation is a gift in intangible form, and should be treated with the same amount of reverence and consideration that a gift merits.

Let me elaborate a little bit on what I mean by accepting all invitations. The event could be anything: a birthday party, a dinner, a baby shower, a professional networking event, a gallery opening, a special interest meeting, a free event, a pay event. Show up. There will be times when you don't know the host very well. Show up. There will be times when the event seems a little too far away. Show up – you just never know who else is going to be there and what could happen. Get the machinery of fate in motion. At other times, you may feel that you won't know many people at the event. That means you should *show up* – if you avoided meeting strangers, you'd stay in your living room for the rest of your life. Remember that there are only two kinds of people: friends and future friends. And if you said you would show up, *show up*, even if you don't fully feel like it at the last minute. Be impeccable with your word, because your word is your honor.

Of course, there will be times when you have conflicts and can't attend the event, and that's acceptable. Decline politely, express your regrets and do your best to attend that host's next event.

Step 2: Honor all contacts.

So you showed up to the event. That's great. You will now speak to a variety of people. Some may not fully catch your attention. Some of the members of the opposite sex may not be your type, and you may never consider dating them. That's okay – honor the contact anyway. If you speak to someone, no matter how briefly, exchange cards with that person. The value of a social network is directly proportional to the square of the number of nodes (or members) it has, so *accept and honor all contacts*. One person could show up to your next party and bring some other interesting people along. One person may become a valued business contact, or lead you to one in the future. One person may later introduce you to someone whom you *would* consider dating. Be inclusive. You're not too cool to have new friends, and nobody has enough. Your aim is to become a *connector*, as Malcolm Gladwell describes in *The Tipping Point* – someone who is at the hub of a big network of individuals.

One of the biggest mistakes that men make in their social networking is to fixate on meeting just women (or even worse, only attractive women). Don't be one of those

people. More often than not, it's usually the solid, cool guys that you meet that add the most enrichment to your life in the long term. Some of the best friendships in my life came about because I ended up talking to some really interesting guy while ignoring all the women at a given event.

Step 3: Follow up on all contacts

Now you have a stack of business cards, phone numbers and emails from a bunch of people. What should you do with them? Most people will wait until there's something pertinent to contact that person about. And 99.7% of the time, that's means they will never contact them again. But not you, because you will send a note to all the people that you meet within 48 hours of meeting them. I prefer to do it the day after, just because that way I know I'm not missing anyone, and I'll remember them well. If you wait a week, you will usually forget entirely, and after that, they may not remember who you are. So do it the next day. It doesn't have to be anything fancy – just say it was nice meeting them, mention something about your conversation, and close by saying that you look forward to keeping in touch.

Step 4: Give back.

Now that you have accepted all these fabulous invitations, it's time to issue some of your own. The absolutely best way to do that is to throw a party. You have compiled all of the contacts you have made over the past few months into an email list, and now you will send them all a zippy invitation. Have at least 120 names on your list before sending out invitations, and invite at least twice as many women as men in order to ensure an even ratio (for some reason, uninvited men *will* find your party – count on it). I like to throw my parties on a Saturday night to maximize attendance, since many professionals are too tired to party on a Friday night. I recommend four weeks advance notice for your event (and two weeks at the absolute minimum). That way people can block out that Saturday evening beforehand, and you get priority over any other events that may be going on that night.

Your party will be a reflection of who you are, so make it *compelling* (that word again). To do that, I recommend having a compelling *theme*. The more you make people

dress up and do things for the party, the more compelling your party will be, and the more likely it will be that they show up. Why? Recall the principle from the Tao of Dating chapter on attraction: the way to make people like you is to have them do things for you, not the other way around. So the more things people have to do to attend your party, the more they will like the party before they even show up, and the more they will enjoy it once they do show up. This also activates the Cialdini commitment and consistency principle, make it more likely that they will actually attend when they say they will.

Here are some ideas for themes, some of which I have used successfully in the past:

- Sense of Smell party: everybody brings something interesting to smell
- Silent Party: people aren't allowed to talk for 10-minute stretches during the party and have to communicate on notepads. Much more fun than you think.
- Pajama/lingerie party
- Blindfold party: everybody gets blindfolded for a stretch of time
- Chocolate party: everyone has to bring a piece of gourmet chocolate to share
- Rock stars and models party
- Raunchy poem and limerick party: everyone brings an erotic poem or bawdy limerick which gets posted on a wall
- Candy necklace party: everyone wears a candy necklace, with a prize for whomever gets their necklace eaten up first
- Pimp and Ho (perennial favorite)
- Moroccan: decorate the place and have everyone dress up Moroccan style; have hookahs, Middle Eastern food and belly-dancing contests

I recommend that you have an element of dress-up and sensuality in your themes. People (especially women) are always looking for an outlet to break out of their everyday roles and express their sensual sides in unusual ways. Beautiful and physically fit women will generally jump at any opportunity to legitimately show off their bodies that they have worked so hard on, so give them the excuse. Every time I threw a Pimp and Ho

party, costume stores within a 5-mile radius would get depleted of supplies, and everybody would show up fully decked out. This makes for an event that will be remembered for years to come.

I also highly recommend including dancing in the party. Dancing brings people out of their heads and into their bodies, adding an element of sensuality and interactivity to the party. If you can get a DJ, so much the better, but just a few hours of choice songs programmed on an MP3 player can also do the trick.

Throwing a party is a magical thing for many reasons. First off, as host, you are *the* dominant male at the event. No question. This gives you tremendous social leverage with everyone at the party, especially the women. Second, you now have license to speak to anyone at any time. “How are things going?” “Thanks for making it to the party.” You don’t need any excuses or techniques to strike up a conversation with anyone. Third, you are getting *tremendous* social proof, sending your attractiveness sky-high. After all, everybody is at the party because of you, directly or indirectly. Fourth, you are demonstrating your access to resources without being showy about it. The event is at your place, you have arranged for all the refreshments and amenities, and everybody notices that – especially the women. This is a demonstration of status, creating attraction. Fifth, the party allows all the desirable women you’ve invited to be at your home in a socially acceptable context. So if things do progress well with any one of them, you need not worry about the logistics of getting to your place (see the section in Chapter 9 of *The Tao of Dating* on ‘The prime determinant of progression to sexual activity’).

Being a good host means making sure everyone is having a good time, so enjoy yourself while making your guests’ pleasure a priority. Connect people together whom you think would have something in common – more friendships in your network only makes the network stronger. And make sure you have a guest sign-in as people enter the party. My experience has shown that about half of the people who show up to your parties are people you don’t know. So make sure you capture the value of their presence and get their emails. After the party, send a thank you to everybody who attended, maybe even including some photos from the event.

I recommend throwing a party every two or three months. That way people will still remember how much fun they had at the last party, and will be eager to attend the

next one. More importantly, you will have forgotten how much work it was to throw the last party and will be willing to do it again. Having regular events gives you a reputation and sets up an expectation in your audience. Additionally, it allows you to get the contact information from any number of people in any context. Normally, it would be awkward to get the contact information from several women right in front of all of them, especially if they all know each other and are potentially interested in you. However, if you say, “Hey, I’m throwing a party soon and would love to invite you all,” it only makes sense to hand them a piece of paper for all of them to jot down their email addresses on.

The power of names and pictures

I’m going to give you two more tips for becoming a social networking god. The first is to get people’s names and remember them. In *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Dale Carnegie remarked that the sweetest-sounding word in any language is a person’s name. Hearing your own name feels good, pure and simple. By remembering and using people’s names, you make them feel loved, memorable and important. They will reciprocate by making sure you feel memorable and important as well. Here are some tips for remembering names:

- Get both first and last names. Full names tend to have more memorable details.
- Politely ask them to repeat the name right after they say it.
- Immediately repeat the name after you get it. “Wendy Campanelli. Nice to meet you, Wendy. I’m Steve Waterston.”
- Ask the person to spell the name for you, and ask about the ethnic origin of the name if pertinent.
- Repeat the name in conversation. “You know, Wendy, I was just reading this article the other day about remembering names...” Do it at least three times during the course of your exchange.
- Repeat the name internally when you’re not speaking or when you’re at a break.
- During a break, review all the names of the people you have met so far.
- Whenever possible, create some kind of mnemonic link between the person you’ve met and his or her name. One way to do it is to attach an animal that starts with her first

initial to her name, along with some activity that the animal engages in. For example, Wendy Campanelli would become ‘Wendy the water buffalo who snorts water out of her nostrils.’ The more outrageous and funny the image, the better it will stick in your head. Even better, ask her to pick the animal and activity herself – it makes for a great icebreaker.

For more mnemonic techniques on remembering names (and anything else, for that matter), I recommend the outstanding manual *Use Your Perfect Memory*, by Tony Buzan.

Another technique for increasing the friendship quotient in your life is to take lots of pictures with people. With the advent of digital cameras, it is possible to take and transmit unlimited photos at minimal cost. Yet the effect of a snapshot is still powerful. We’re used to taking snapshots with friends and family, so we tend to associate feelings of warmth and nostalgia with people in our snapshots, even if the photo was taken just ten seconds ago. Utilize this effect and take tons of photos with yourself and your new acquaintances in them. Invest in a digital camera, or use the now-ubiquitous camera on your cell phone. I recommend a stand-alone digital camera for three reasons. First, you can take higher-quality photos which you can then download to your computer and send via email. Second, it can actually act as a portable picture album, with that picture of you skydiving or that adorable snapshot of your niece that just happens to be there. Additionally, the camera can serve as the perfect icebreaker as you approach someone you’d like to meet and ask politely if she’d be kind enough to take a snapshot of you and your friend. This is another 100% foolproof technique for making the first contact with women – it has simply never failed.

How to own the bars and nightclubs in your town

Back when I lived in Boston and used to go to bars and clubs with some regularity, it seemed as if I knew every bouncer and bartender in town. I never had to wait in line, and often when I’d arrive at the bar, the bartender would already have my favorite drink ready for me and refuse to take my money. Your town may be bigger or smaller than Boston, but the principles that I used are applicable anywhere.

The key principle here is to *get to know the staff* and *treat them exceptionally well*. Since you're already a nice guy, this should not be a stretch. Treating people well does *not* mean giving them huge tips all the time – in fact, I recommend against that. It means imagining that this person is like a close friend or family member (one that you like, preferably), and treating them accordingly. Here's what you do:

- Show up to venues *early* or *on off days*. This is when the establishment isn't too busy, and you can chat with the bouncers and bartenders at ease. Make the staff laugh, entertain them, ask them about their lives. The work is deadly boring when there's no one around, so they will appreciate the company. You are making a bond with them as a *person*, not as a customer. So guess whom they will pull out of line and send inside next time fifty people are waiting to get in? In all the years that I have skipped the line at a club or bar in my hometown, I have *never* tipped the bouncer, because *you don't have to tip your friends to be nice to you*.
- If you like to tip bouncers, do it *once* and do it *after* you've already gotten in or *on your way out*. Why? Because if you tip them before you get in, you're begging or bribing. Whereas if you tip him after you've already gotten in or on your way out, you are rewarding and appreciating. Which gesture conveys more class – the bribe or the present? Which kind of person would you value more? If there's more than one bouncer, you may have to tip each one individually. Think of it as a one-time investment that pays off dividends over time.
- Instead of tipping bouncers and bartenders, consider giving them little presents. Why? Because friends give each other gifts, not money. I had a habit of carrying some very high-quality nugget-size Italian chocolate with me whenever I went out, and I'd give one to the bouncer on my way into the club (regardless of whether there was a line or not) or leave it on top of my tip after getting a drink. Take it from me – this makes you stand out from the crowd in a *big* way, and chances are the staff will *never* forget you. In fact, they will go out of their way to be nice to you.
- Remember everyone's name, and make sure they know yours. If you can know their last names, even better. While every other punter in the bar is an anonymous potential problem, you are that cool guy Jeff that every staff member likes. When a bartender calls

you by name (especially if she's an attractive woman herself), all the other women will sit up and pay attention, wondering who you are. You have immediate social proof, which can only help you.

- Finally, bring a lot of positive energy to your interactions with the staff members. If you're upbeat and fun and happy and making everyone laugh and generally making their day better, they *will* remember you and they *will* appreciate you for it, even if you don't do any of the other things I mentioned. This is by far the most important of the five tips.

If you do all or even just some of these things, miracles will follow. Long lines will vanish for you, free drinks will materialize for you out of nowhere, nobody will harass you to leave the establishment, even after the chairs are up and they're mopping the floor, and you will be invited to staff afterparties with no effort of your own. Why? Because you are now a friend of the establishment, and friends do nice things for each other. That's why they're called friends, buddy.

Final thoughts

Like everything else in life, you get out of your social networking what you put into it. So if you put in enthusiasm, caring, fun and attention, that's what you'll get out of it severalfold. Entertaining friends is great fun, and being a host is a tremendous privilege and joy in its own right. When you learn to be that host all the time, wherever you go people will be naturally attracted to you. Make this part of your plan for personal growth.

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