



Duncan Nuggets®

The Resource Center For Competitive Advantage

Serving Young People and Professionals Working with Them

Million-Dollar Networking Questions

The power of networking is common knowledge nowadays. What's not so common is knowing how to consistently and effectively do it. Networking is simple, but far from easy.

Whenever I'm speaking to a group about networking at least one person asks, "But what do you say (or talk about) when you first meet someone?" And someone else will inevitably ask, "What do you say (or do) when there's a lull in the conversation?"

My response to both questions is the same. First decide if the person is really in the mood to talk to you. If you feel like someone doesn't really want to talk to you, it's no big deal. Move on to someone else.

If the person seems willing to engage in conversation then remember this nugget. It's one of the supreme laws of networking:

Duncan Nugget® #241:
Make fewer statements; ask more questions.

The timeless advice offered by Dale Carnegie in [*How to Win Friends & Influence People*](#) is that you "*allow the other person to do a great deal of the talking.*"

The easiest way to keep the other person talking and loving you the entire time is to ask the right kind of open-ended questions.

Why?

Because open-ended questions require more than a yes or no response and show that you are interested in the other person. These types of questions help to build and maintain rapport.

Here are 10 powerful networking questions – listed in no particular

order – to keep awkward silence and fruitless small talk at bay. The insightful answers to these questions keep conversations moving once you get past “Where are you from?” and “So, what brings you here today?”

1. How did you get involved in...?

People like to tell their story. Give them an opportunity to do so while you listen attentively and they'll love you.

VARIATIONS:

1a. What made you decide to major in...?

1b. What made you decide to attend (name of school)?

1c. What made you decide to go into the ___ business?

1d. How did you get your start in the ___ business?

2. What advice would you give me if I wanted to be successful in your line of work (or major)?

This is a great follow up question to #1. It shows your humility and allows for mentoring.

VARIATION:

What advice would you give someone just starting in this business/profession/major?

3. What do you love/enjoy most about what you do?

This question keeps happy feelings in the air.

And just in case you're wondering whether or not it's a good idea to ask what a person likes the least about what he or she does, the answer is no, unless you're in the same line of work or major.

In which case, the answer will help you to find a common enemy IF you dislike the same things. If not, then disagreement ensues. My advice is to keep it positive whenever possible.

VARIATION:

What do you love/enjoy most about your business/profession/major?

4. What separates you from the competition?

This question gives a person permission to tout his unique abilities. Be sure to ask this question in a polite and inquisitive tone of voice so that it doesn't sound like you're challenging the person.

VARIATIONS:

4a. What separates your business/company/organization from the competition?

4b. What separates your school from other schools like it?

5. What one thing would you do if you knew that you could not fail?

A truly thought provoking and inspiring question to ask. (You should ask yourself this question.) It helps and encourages a person to dream and when she revisits the dream there's a chance that you'll come to mind often. That's powerful.

VARIATIONS:

5a. What one thing would you do with your business if you knew that you could not fail?

5b. What one thing would you do if you knew you were guaranteed to succeed?

6. What was the strangest or funniest incident you've experienced in your business?

People love to share war stories, but seldom get a chance to finish them because others interrupt with their own stories.

When you ask this question resist the temptation to interject your own horror tale. Remember – "let the other person do a great deal of the talking."

VARIATIONS:

6a. What was the strangest or funniest incident you've experienced at your school?

6b. What was the strangest or funniest incident you've experienced in your organization? (e.g. Sorority or fraternity)

7. What significant changes have you seen take place in your profession/area of expertise through the years?

Great question for cross-generational networking because it allows a person to reminisce about the good old days. The following variations are good for upper classmen and graduate students.

VARIATIONS:

7a. What significant changes have you seen take place at your school since you've been here?

7b. What significant changes have you seen take place in your major since you chose it?

8. What do you see as the coming trends in your profession/area of expertise?

This is a great follow up question to #7. This shows a person that his opinions matter to you.

VARIATIONS:

8a. How do think your school will be different in the future?

8b. What do you see as the coming trends in your major?

8c. What do you think will change about your major in the future?

9. So, (person's name), if someone were to describe you in one sentence what would she say?

Another very thought provoking question. Normally it is best used later in the conversation. You're not interviewing someone; you're

networking.

VARIATIONS:

9a. If some were to describe your business/company/school in one sentence what would he say?

9b. What ways have you found to be the most effective for promoting your business/organization/product?

10. It's the end of a great week and you have some free time on your hands – what would you do?

This question will take someone to a happy place and help you to know her outside of professional or academic life.

VARIATION:

What do you like to do in your spare time?

BONUS:

Million-Dollar Question:

What would make someone the ideal employee for your company or organization?

The information you glean from this answer is priceless. It will allow you to give a person exactly what he or she wants. It will also help you to position yourself as a great asset to the person and his company.

VARIATIONS:

a. How would you describe the ideal client/customer/prospect/employee for your company/organization?

b. What would make someone a perfect fit for your profession/major/school/company/organization?

There is no need to memorize all 11 of these questions. Just start off with the 3 or 4 you like the most. Master them and then give the others a test run.

Keep in mind that no question in the world will help you be a better networker if you are not truly interested in the other person.

So, be interested, ask questions, and let the other person do the talking.

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Al Duncan is an award-winning youth advocate, publisher, and internationally recognized authority on soft skills who travels the world ***“Equipping Young Minds For Exceptional Performance.”***™” As the leading motivational speaker for at-risk youth and troubled young people, Al has delivered **Duncan Nuggets®**, live and in-person, to over 1 million young people around the world.

Al is the founder of **Young Scribes™**, a free marketing and fundraising program that allows schools and youth organizations to raise money and increase tangible outcomes by publishing books written by their young people. Al is the author of 4 books including, ***My Success Journal for Young People (3rd Edition)***.

Growing up in a dangerous, poverty stricken neighborhood, being molested as a child, and drug abuse in his immediate family, by today's standards, Al would've been labeled an at-risk student.

Devastated, but not defeated, He went on to enjoy careers as a professional saxophone player, a professional chef, and he is the former executive producer and host of his own television show. At the age of 24 he walked away from his musical career and took on the tremendous responsibility of raising his youngest brother who was 12 years old at the time.

Duncan Nugget® #21: “Failure is only permanent if you quit.”