

Networking in 2026: Still Awkward, Still Essential — Just Smarter

Amy Stewart (FILP) – January 2026

Some of us love it.

Some of us tolerate it.

Some of us know we *should* do more of it... and some of us would rather reorganise the pantry than walk into a room full of strangers.

Yes — we're talking about **networking**.

Traditionally defined as “a socioeconomic business activity through which people recognise, create, or act upon opportunities”, networking in 2026 is less about forced small talk and more about **intentional, human connection**.

And after plenty of conversations recently (yes, we've been networking to our hearts' content), one thing is clear: the most effective networkers aren't the loudest — they're the most thoughtful.

So, with that in mind, here are our **top five networking tips**.

1. Remember *one* personal thing — just one

Not their entire life story.

Not their LinkedIn headline.

Just **one genuine, human detail**.

How does it feel when someone remembers something about *you*? Your dog's name. A recent house renovation. An upcoming trip. A child starting school. A health challenge you mentioned in passing.

Remembering one small thing signals interest, care and presence — and it instantly turns a follow-up conversation (or email) from transactional to meaningful.

It's also an excellent opener next time you connect:

“How did the renovation go?”

“Did your daughter enjoy her first week?”

Connection remembered is connection strengthened.

2. Rethink the business card (yes, really)

Are business cards dead? Not quite — but they've definitely evolved.

If you're still using them, ask yourself:

How many cards in your wallet actually stand out?

In 2026, a memorable card might include:

- A bold design or unexpected orientation
- A QR code linking to your LinkedIn, website or booking page
- Minimal text with maximum clarity

Think of your card as a **micro-brand experience**, not just contact details. If it sparks a comment or a smile, you've already won.

(And if you're card-free? Make sure your *digital presence* does the heavy lifting instead.)

3. Connect digitally — and do it intentionally

Networking no longer ends when the event does.

If you meet someone and see potential value in staying connected, **follow up immediately**:

- Connect on LinkedIn
- Follow their professional Instagram or business page
- Send a short, personal message while the interaction is fresh

Some people even play the long game — waiting a week or two before connecting as a gentle reminder that they exist. Strategic? Possibly. Risky? Also possibly.

Either way, one non-negotiable in 2026:

Your profile photo and bio must be current and professional (for your field).

No pixelated headshots. No decade-old photos. Your digital presence *is* your brand — make sure it reflects who you are *now*.

4. Do your homework before the cold connect

If you haven't met someone yet — but you've been referred, admire their work, or see mutual value — take five minutes to **learn about them** before hitting "connect".

Read their website. Scan their profile. Notice what matters to them.

And if you're reaching out cold, always include a short note:

- Why you're connecting
- How you came across them
- Who (if anyone) suggested the introduction

Yes, LinkedIn still hides notes in the app sometimes — annoying, but survivable. If they accept without responding, wait a beat and then follow up with a proper introduction message.

Thoughtful beats rushed. Every time.

5. If you say "Let's grab a coffee" — mean it

The world is full of "*We should catch up sometime*" conversations that go absolutely nowhere.

If you suggest a coffee:

- Do it soon — or
- Be honest and say you'll reconnect later

A simple follow-up keeps you front of mind and quickly reveals whether there's a genuine professional relationship to build — now or down the track.

And yes, when you do meet?

Start with that one personal thing you remembered.

One final thought

Networking isn't about collecting contacts — it's about **cultivating relationships**.

So pick just one of these tips. Try it this month. Notice what shifts.

And tell me — which one feels easiest for you to start with? Or which one do you quietly avoid (be honest 😊)?

I'd love to hear what works for you.