

I Hope They Like Me. I Hope They Like Me. (Hint: We do!)

Once in a while, our professional lives can suddenly take us back to a middle school cafeteria.

We walk into a PRSA event, or any organization's (Rotary, Chamber, etc.) gathering, and we may feel like the only person who does not know anyone. It feels cliquy. It can feel like we are alone. It can feel like seventh grade lunch period.

If this is a familiar scene for you, I can offer a solution: Treat it like you would a crisis communication plan.

1. Deal with it head-on
2. Own it and address it
3. Listen to your audience
4. Follow-up with action

Deal with it head-on

Do not hide from the crowd. Face each individual, introduce yourself and ask questions.

Own it and address it

Admit it is your first meeting, or your second meeting, or that you have not attended in a while.

Whatever the truth is, own it. Even if it is as simple as addressing that you are nervous, you can use your situation as a conversation-starter.

Listen to your audience

So you owned it and introduced yourself. Now, listen and hear what the person or people you meet have to say. Ask them questions and invest yourself in their answers.

You will most likely learn that you are not the only person who feels new to the crowd.

You also might learn that what looks like a large clique of professionals who all know each other is actually just a group of peers huddling over the dessert tray fighting over the miniature double chocolate cupcakes.

Finally, you may uncover the rare individual who does know everyone at the event and is willing to introduce you to others.

Follow-up with action

After the event concludes, follow-up with people you met with a firm action. Catch them before they depart the event, send an email later in the day, tag an individual in a Tweet, or mail a card to show gratitude for their hospitality and similar professional interests.

Leave the middle school cafeteria behind because I am confident the above four steps work. If you put it into action at a professional development luncheon, Pinnacles Awards dinner, a New Pros gathering, or other PRSA event, let us know how what happened.

One last helpful hint: Everyone in our Chapter does not already know each other. Meeting new PR professionals is one of many benefits each PRSA function offers all of us.