

Welcome to Conference Commando.

A conference offers almost unlimited opportunities to build relationships with extraordinary people, people who can have significant impact on your professional or personal success. You (and your organization) are investing time and money to put you in the middle of all of that opportunity. To maximize the return on those investments, you can't afford to be a Conference Commoner, aimlessly handing out business cards to anyone willing to take them.

Complete these **15 RMA- style Mini Missions** before and during the conference to develop new mindsets and skills and earn the title:

Conference Commando!

-Keith Ferrazzi – CEO, myGreenlight
myGreenlight.com

Mission #1: Remember the 7 P's.

Proper Prior Planning Prevents Piss-Poor Performance. Military strategists know that most battles are won before the first shot is fired. The side that determines where, when, and how an engagement is fought usually gains an insurmountable advantage.

Weeks before the conference take the time to think through why you are attending, what you want to achieve and whom you want to meet. Write down and clearly articulate what you want and need from the conference and then get started on planning and executing the steps to meet those goals.

Mission #2: Know your targets.

Get the list of conference attendees somehow—call the conference organizers, ask your friends who are going if they know of other attendees, or whatever it takes.

Go through the list and note which attendees you want to meet and why (referring back to your goals from Mission #1!) Keep that list with you at all times during the conference (including social events) so you know whom you've met and whom you still need to meet.

Mission #3: Gather intelligence.

Before you walk into the conference, adopt the first of my Four Mindsets for relationship building: Generosity. The other three – vulnerability, candor, and accountability – will come in handy too, but generosity is where it all starts when building new relationships. Make sure that when you're interacting one-one-one with people that you're leading with authentic generosity – that means being willing to help without keeping score.

Review your list of whom you want to meet, which was aligned back to your overall goals for the conference, and start to figure out what currency you can offer to help them.

Google each person. Of course, their business interests will be most obvious, but do some deeper research to learn about their human sides. What hobbies are they interested in? What city do they live in? Where are they from? Are they active in their community?

Find your currency for each person — your experience, knowledge, contacts, or resources that can make them more successful. Write down what you have to offer each person on your original list, so you remember what you want to offer to each one throughout the conference.

And get this: the best part of doing your homework is that it doesn't have to be a secret. When you meet your target contact, say, "I always make a special effort to inquire about the people I'd like to meet." Inevitably, people are flattered. Wouldn't you be?

Mission #4: Strike early.

You don't have to wait for the conference date to start your networking activities. A week or two beforehand, pick up the phone and call at least the top three people you want to be SURE to meet. (And no whiny excuses about not being able to find their coordinates. This is the information age!)

Begin your conversations now and/or arrange a time for when you arrive at the conference. Can't get past their gatekeepers? Surprise them with a fax or a voice message when they arrive at the conference and save them from spending the night alone in their rooms—most likely in the very hotel where you're staying! Say, "I'll be downstairs at 8 with a few people for drinks and dinner. Would you like to join us?"

Mission #5: Claim your Fame.

You too can be a conference speaker, even if your name isn't on the program. While keynote speakers are basically given hour-long infomercials for their brands, you can acquire a 30 second commercial for yours just by asking a thoughtful question during Q&A. Stand tall, say your name and what you do, and then ask a great question. Then enjoy your temporary celebrity status after the session. People will be eager to approach you once you've been introduced in a public forum.

Mission #6: Slight the speakers.

Don't waste time standing in line to meet a speaker after his or her song and dance. There will be so many other brilliant people at the conference; go meet someone who doesn't have a crowd vying for his attention! If you must meet the speakers, approach them before their talks, before they have captivated the attention and adoration of the masses. Don't waste precious time standing in line, or have your ability to create impact diminished by becoming one of a dozen clamoring fans.

Mission #7: Get a wingman.

Just as people lose weight more effectively with a workout partner or formal accountability group, you'll be more successful in executing your conference attach plan if you team up! If possible, set such a partnership in motion in advance of the conference, but if not, just be ready to be on the lookout for the right match as soon as you arrive.

To be most effective, you and your buddy share must share with each other your real reasons for attending the conference whether it's to look for a new job, to fill your sales pipeline, or maybe even to seek a romantic relationship. This is the time to embrace a couple more of the mindsets I mentioned earlier, vulnerability and candor.

By being honest about your motivation, you will be able to provide each other with motivation, guidance, and assistance. Wouldn't it be great to show up to the conference with somebody who's actually on your side, who's got your back, who's working with you?

Mission #8: Draft off a big kahuna.

Get to know some of the most well-known folks at the conference or the conference organizers themselves and hang with them. The important people will rotate by them sooner or later. If you're there, you'll meet everyone who matters. And if you need to reach out to someone who doesn't happen to swing by, ask your new friend—a big kahuna—for an introduction.

Mission #9: Find a way to help...everyone.

We already talked about generosity. Now, what kind of currency can you create that applies to everyone you meet? One easy, broadly helpful option is to become an info-hub by becoming an expert on the conference program. Then pick the brains of conference staff and anyone else willing to share the ins and outs of what's happening in and around the big meeting. If you're in the loop on the private parties and after-hours special events, everyone will come to you for the goods.

Mission #10: Work hard on break.

Don't run off to stuff your face or check e-mail between sessions. You should attend to your bagel and BlackBerry while boring speakers like me are blabbing on and on, so when break time comes, you can get out there and do what you really came to the conference to do—meet people!

Mission #11: Hijack a dinner.

True commandos aren't constrained by the agendas they receive at registration. Scope out the conference locale in advance, and scan the schedule for the right time to organize your own mini-event. Arrange a dinner at a special place out on the town and invite people who care about a particular topic that matters to you, or modify a conference meal that's already paid for by inviting specific people to join your table as you meet them during the day. There's usually no assigned seating. If there is, just tell a conference organizer that you prefer to reassign yourself. They exist to make the conference better for you.

Mission #12: Let your guard down – and find a way to care.

When you walk into a room, make it your mission to find at least one person that you could care about. When you see the room through those eyes, you become more authentic, more confident, and more open to connecting.

As important, when you engage a target contact, don't you dare talk about the weather! That makes no impact at all. Skip the small talk and dive into the stuff that really matters to you and them: interests, passions, struggles, and greatest needs. You'll have to push yourself to be human and open up enough to get your acquaintance to start sharing. Then listen, listen, listen with warmth and sincerity. If you are able to help them, do so. Generosity and intimacy are the two keys to making quick connections that jumpstart lasting relationships.

Mission #13: Master the Deep Bump.

Once you've successfully taken your conversation with a new acquaintance down deep, past the shallow small talk, secure an invitation to reconnect later. Then bump! Move on and meet more people. Don't be like the co-dependent "ankle hugger" (way down in the "Don't" section) who thinks the first person he meets is his best friend forever. You've invested too much time and money (and planning!) in this conference not to take the opportunity to meet many different people. You have a lifetime to build relationships with people at the conference, but only a few days to meet them.

Mission #14: Take names – and make commitments.

Before you conclude the Deep Bump, and move on after making a new acquaintance, be sure to get a business card. Of course, you should quickly scan the card and say the person's name aloud to help commit it to memory. Furthermore, flip over the card and jot down a few words to remind yourself of what you two discussed, any relevant personal details you wish to remember, and, of course, when and why you're going to follow up later.

When you feel you've made a special connection, be sure to make a commitment to each other – Accountability is the final mind set for building deep, sustainable relationships. Presumably you've shared some of your mutual passions and goals, perhaps even some of your challenges. Get specific enough to make a commitment to each other to follow up after the conference – have you moved your goals forward? If not, how can you help each other do that, stat? Making mutual commitments creates the trusting bonds that can change your life – what I call “lifeline relationships.”

Mission #15: Follow up or fail.

Don't wait until you return home from the conference to ping people whose cards you collect. Shoot out follow-up e-mails each night of the event or write them during your flight home.

If you complete all of these missions, you can officially claim to be a Conference Commando and you will never spend another break huddled up with your Blackberry, or find a dusty rubber-banded stack of business cards in your bag as you pack for the next year's conference. So get that conference agenda and start planning!

Bonus: How NOT to Be a Conference Commando

*Your goal is to be a Conference Commando.
More importantly, you don't want to be these people.*

THE WALLFLOWER

The limp handshake, the position in the far corner of the room, the unassuming demeanor—all signs that this person thinks he or she is there merely to watch the speakers.

THE ANKLE HUGGER

A total codependent, this type thinks that the first person they meet is their BFF (best friend forever). Out of fear, they shadow their one friend for the entire conference. You've spent too much money not to leverage the opportunity to meet many different people. So bump! You have a lifetime to build relationships with these people. Collect as many follow-ups as you can.

THE CELEBRITY HOUND

This type funnels every bit of their energy into trying to meet the most important person at the event. But, if the person they want to meet truly is the most important person at the conference, that person will be on their guard. And maybe even guarded, literally.

A young friend of mine went to see the King of Jordan speak recently and came back ecstatic. He had waited an hour or more, along with 500 other people, for a chance to shake the King's hand. For his effort, he could claim only that he had "met" the King. I pointed out to him that there were probably at least a handful of dignitaries and members of the King's cabinet in that room whom no one knew or wanted to know. Wouldn't it have been better for my young friend to actually have a conversation with one of them, instead of a brief moment with someone who will not remember him?

Maybe he could have struck up a relationship with someone who actually had the ear of the King. Instead, he got a photo and a handshake.

THE SMARMY EYE DARTER

Shifty eyes are a sign of dishonesty, you don't want that to be the first impression you make! Practice making genuine eye contact, Bill Clinton is the master of this. If you spend only thirty seconds with someone, make it thirty seconds of warmth and sincerity. Nothing will give you a good rap in less time.

THE CARD DISPENSER/AMASSER

This guy passes his card out like it had the cure for cancer written on its back. Frankly, cards are overrated. If you perform the bump successfully, and extract a promise for a future meeting, or make a real commitment to each other, a piece of paper is irrelevant. This person gloats over the number of "contacts" he's made. In reality, he's created nothing more valuable than a phone book with people's names and numbers to cold-call.