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conferences, or even meetings in your local area, how do you go about meeting the “right” people?

Now I don't mean “right” in terms of discriminating one person from another; what I really mean is meeting the kind of people who can offer you the most benefits in terms of referrals, business and anything else that adds to your productivity and grows your practice or business.

I'm attending the AICPA's TECH+/Practitioners Symposium next week and always look to this conference as a way to meet accountants and technology experts who can add to my own business, either by sourcing authors for articles or gaining knowledge for future projects. I'm also seeing many friends and colleagues, so I always hope to renew friendships and spend some time gabbing about accounting and technology.

Of course, I'd like to get a new client or two out of this conference, but that's not my main goal. I don't think anyone goes into a networking situation with the expectation that he or she will immediately gain a new client or customer. These things take time.

So what we're really talking about is networking. As an attendee who may not know very many people at a conference, how can you maximize your experience? Here are some tips:

Go to the receptions and social gatherings. I know the last thing you may want to do at the end of a jam-packed day is smile and hold a drink, but making the effort to do so can make a very big difference in who you might meet.

If you are by yourself without anyone else from your firm, don't go to your room for dinner! Take pot luck and sign up for group dinners, or take the initiative to ask around if you can join a group that is going out. I know that takes a lot of effort,

especially if you are an introvert like me, but please try. Remember that if you are

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or call me. I'm sure to follow up with everyone you meet, even if it's nothing more than a quick e-mail or phone call.

What are some of your tips for meeting others at conferences and gatherings?

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